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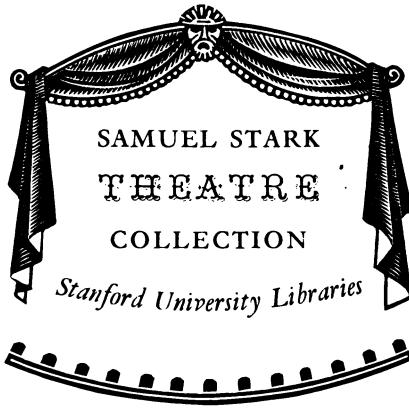
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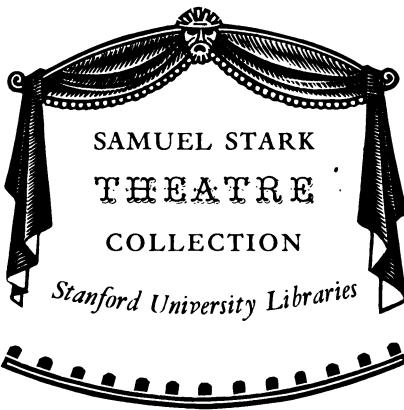
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FIVE
ONE-ACT
COMEDIES

BY
LAWRENCE
LANGNER







ROGER
FARNOR

OAKLAND CAL.

NOVEMBER 26-1925.

THE DAY WE BOUGHT THE LOTS.



FIVE ONE-ACT COMEDIES

FIVE ONE-ACT COMEDIES

By
LAWRENCE LANGNER
≡

Introduction by
ST. JOHN ERVINE



CINCINNATI
STEWART KIDD COMPANY
PUBLISHERS

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TO
ESTELLE LANGNER

I wish to thank my friend Philip Moeller, of the Theatre Guild of New York, who produced most of these plays, for his helpful advice and suggestions.

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PREFACE

Lawrence Langner, the author of these plays, is a typical American: he was born in Europe; and like all typical Americans, he is not happy outside New York. If he were a casual American, one who is American merely through accident of birth, he would probably prefer to spend his time in London or Paris, mugging-up European culture in the hope that some of it might stick to him, but since he is a typical American and has wished for Americanization instead of having it wished on him, he spends his time at the unfashionable end of Fifth Avenue, trying to develop a culture which derives, not from Europe, but from Cape Cod. He will not live to see an American culture which does not derive from the Old World, but at least he and the group, whose most interesting member is Mr. Eugene O'Neill, are doing much to make the way easier for a more definitely American culture to establish itself. There are obvious dangers which may overwhelm these pioneers, such as arrogance and argumentativeness and smugness and self-satisfaction and a disproportionate view of things and, above all, a tendency to imagine that the new and disorderly thing is better than the orderly and old; but if the pioneers have sound constitutions, they will survive them. It is easier, perhaps, for an Irishman to be aware of these dangers than for anyone else because he sees them manifested so clearly in his own country where pettifogging patriotism has

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reached such a state of sickening smugness that the Irish people, the only people in the world who made a profit out of the War, thrust their academic grievances upon the consideration of a wounded world as if they were of greater importance than those of the rest of humanity put together. Millions of Austrians and Russians may die of starvation and infectious disease; the whole of Central Europe may sink into misery and ruin, while the rest of Europe wonders how long it can manage to keep up appearances; but none of these things matter to Ireland, which behaved during the War like an hysterical woman who should rush into the presence of a man bleeding to death and exclaim, "My God, I've got a toothache!"

These plays deal with the problem of marriage and the problem of family life, and are the kind of plays which are only written by a man who is happily married and peculiarly responsive to the ties of kindred. The thesis of them is the quite admirable one that the ceremony of marriage is not a sort of yardstick by which we can accurately measure human relationships. I do not know how many persons there are in the world who look upon the institution of marriage as a rigid mould into which all sorts of couples can be poured in the sure and certain hope that they will be equally comfortable in it; but I doubt whether the number is large. We may prettify the ceremony of marriage by calling it a sacrament indissoluble except by death, but we do not allow the prettiness of that idea to prevent us from making allowance for the contingency of divorce. The accumulated

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experience of mankind shows that some sort of legal regulation of marriage is necessary if we are to get through the business of existence without being harassed by the details of it. The rule of the road was made, not to annoy and hamper people, but to enable all of us, the slow and swift, to get to our destination with as little misadventure as possible; and so far is it from limiting the swift to the pace of the slow that it actually enables the swift to get ahead of the slow without inflicting hardship on the latter. If there were no rule of the road, traffic would not be in progression, but in collision. What is true of the rule of the road is equally true of the institution of marriage, and all the complaints that are made of it, such, for example as are made of it in these plays, are really complaints about the persons who are parties to it rather than complaints about the thing itself. The free lovers in *Another Way Out* would not be living any more or less happily in the bonds of matrimony than they are in the bonds of unlegalized marriage. I have heard of couples, living, as the technical term goes, in sin, who quarrel as frequently and as bitterly as any couple that ever got themselves blessed by a holy father in a church! I can see no way of removing the disabilities of marriage otherwise than by removing the human race or by de-sexing it. Marriage is, and must always be, a makeshift business in which two dissimilar persons agree to put up a decent pretence of identical desires and to make the best of a bad job by being as tolerant of each other as they can. It is a terrible strain on a man to live with a woman:

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it is an equally terrible strain on a woman to live with a man; and resonable recognition of that fact will make the relationship of husband and wife a fairly endurable one. But the difficulties in the way of making the relationship tolerable are not to be overcome by the hocus-pocus of mysticism or materialism. The priest who tries to persuade us to believe that marriage is a sort of magical rite whereby discordant elements are made completely accordant is not any sillier than the Greenwich Villager who tries to persuade us that we have only got to dispense with the marriage ceremony altogether in order to achieve happiness. I remember, when I was in New York, meeting some very clever women who were founding a society to persuade married women to retain their maiden names. They said that it was degrading to a woman to abandon her maiden name in favor of that of her husband, and they appealed to women to assert their individuality, which consisted, seemingly, in the maiden name. Mrs. John Jones was much less of an individual than Miss Maggie Smith! I suggested to my friends that they were making a great deal of bother about nothing. Apart from the social convenience of a man and a woman who share the same bed sharing the same name—for it must surely be a little awkward when Mr. John Jones and Miss Maggie Smith turn up at an hotel and ask for a room for the night—I failed to see why it was degrading for a woman to bear the name of the man to whom she was willing to bear children, particularly as she had chosen him of her own free will, and not degrading to bear the name of her

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father whom she had not chosen, whom, indeed, she might prefer to be without. A great deal of the intellectual revolt against convention is very like that, and the only safe and comforting rule of conduct for all of us is the belief that institutions which have survived centuries of experience are, on the whole, good institutions; for mankind has an extraordinary capacity for getting rid of customs and manners which are useless to it.

As to the plays themselves, considered as plays and not as arguments, I find in them a sense of comedy which is concerned more with situations than with people. I have seen one of them performed, the jolly little play, called *Pie*, in which Langner's incorrigible domesticity is manifested, and it came over the footlights naturally and easily, rousing laughter and interest. I feel that each of the other plays will act as well as *Pie* did.

In case anyone reading this preface and then reading the plays, imagines that Langner is a sort of cut-throat with a mania for tearing things to pieces, I would like to add that, in addition to being a typical American, he is a man of morbidly respectable character, leading a life of such humdrum convention that the goings-on at a Methodist tea party seem orgiastic in comparison with it. His career when set out might be used by the younger Rockefeller as an example to the members of his Bible class. He is conventionally and happily married; he is conventionally and proudly the father of a charming daughter; and he is conventionally and irresistibly conscious of family ties. He is the most conventional man I know,

PREFACE

with a capacity for sentimental indulgence which makes me, another sentimentalist, feel brutal-minded by comparison. His tastes are simple to the point of austerity. He drinks so little that one feels he does so only to show his contempt for prohibition, that sign of a servile race. If all of us consumed as little tobacco as he does, the tobacco planters would be ruined men. The only defect in his character, from the point of view of the younger Rockefeller, is that he writes plays and is associated with theatrical enterprises; but even in this hellish business, he contrives to behave himself in a way that is considered commendable by the Y. M. C. A., for the theater which he helps to govern, the Garrick, in West 35th Street, where the Theater Guild of New York has its home, is the only intellectual theater in the world which is a commercial success.

ST. JOHN ERVINE.

London, November, 1921.

MATINATA

A COMEDY IN ONE ACT

MATINATA* was first produced by the Provincetown
Players November 1, 1920, at the Playwrights' The-
atre, New York, with the following cast:

COLUMBINE	NORMA MILLAY
PIERROT	JAMES LIGHT
HARLEQUIN	SYDNEY POWELL

*Owing to the general mispronunciation of the original title,
"Mattinata," I have anglicized the spelling of the Italian word.

L. L.

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MATINATA

(A MORNING SONG)

SCENE

A small room in a large city, in which Pierrot and Columbine make their home. The room is neither kitchen, bedroom, nor living-room; but it serves as all three; it is, in fact, a room of a character which is denied to the rich.

There is a bed-couch, left front; door leading to the bathroom, left rear; window, left center wall, bed-couch against center wall; kitchen sink and gas stove, right center wall; cupboard with dishes and chest of drawers against right wall rear; and door leading to staircase to street, right front. In the center are a small table and a few chairs.

Pierrot is in bed; his head lies near the window. Columbine is bustling around, setting the table on which she has already placed some of the breakfast dishes.

COLUMBINE (*to Pierrot*)

Breakfast is nearly ready, Pierrot! Do wake up. (*Pierrot takes no notice. Columbine goes over to sit on the bed.*) Don't you want some coffee? (*Pierrot grunts.*) I'm making a lovely breakfast for you, Pierrot.

PIERROT (*sleepily*)

All right, dear! I'm getting up. (*She waits expectantly; he rolls over and goes back to sleep.*)

FIVE ONE-ACT COMEDIES

COLUMBINE

I'm going to stay here and bother you until you get up! See! I'm a mosquito! I'm buzzing around you! Buzz, buzz, buzz!!! (*She kisses him.*) I'm going to bite you! (*She attempts to bite him.*)

PIERROT

Do go away, dear! Can't you see I'm making up my mind to get up? It takes time. (*He turns over so that his head is covered up, and all one can see of him is his hunched-up back.*)

COLUMBINE

You'll never make up your mind! You know you've lots of things to do today. Please get up, Pierrot! Please do! (*She begins to pull the bedclothes off him.*)

PIERROT

Do leave me alone! I'm getting up. (*He winds the covers around him.*)

COLUMBINE

But breakfast!

PIERROT

I don't want any breakfast. (*He settles down in the bed in a determined manner.*)

COLUMBINE (*hurt*)

Very well!

(*She goes over to the gas stove and pours hot water into the coffee-pot. She looks over at Pierrot to see whether her new attitude will make any difference. It does not. She pulls up the blinds. She puts the coffee-pot on the table with a thud and sits down, moving her chair*

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noisily. She pours herself a cup of coffee. Pierrot raises his head.)

PIERROT (*cheerfully*)

Hello!

(Columbine drinks her coffee with great intensity.)

PIERROT (*shouting*)

Didn't you hear what I said?

COLUMBINE (*coldly*)

What did you say?

PIERROT

I said, "Hello!"

COLUMBINE

I've heard you say that before. Do you know what time it is?

PIERROT

No!

COLUMBINE

It's nearly eleven o'clock.

PIERROT

Now, why did you tell me that? I've slept only —let me see—six hours. You're very irritating!

COLUMBINE

I meant to be.

PIERROT

Very well. I shall go back to sleep. (*He lies back on the bed.*)

COLUMBINE

I don't care. Your company isn't so charming, after all.

PIERROT

I have a lovely idea for a song. If I could write it, I might be able to sell it for a hundred dollars.

FIVE ONE-ACT COMEDIES

COLUMBINE

If only you could!

PIERROT

What couldn't we do with a hundred dollars! I know! We could go to a hotel and have breakfast, lunch, and dinner served in our room so we could stay in bed all day. I wish I could remember that song. Confound you, Columbine, why did you bother me! I was half dreaming of it—and now you've made me forget 'it. (*He sits up.*) It was a song to the dawn—"Matinata"!

COLUMBINE

What do *you* know about the dawn?

PIERROT

There is a great mystery about the dawn. It is seen only by people with very good habits, or by people with very bad habits.

COLUMBINE

It isn't difficult to see where you belong!

PIERROT

Isn't it? Well, I've never seen the dawn—that is, not for years!

COLUMBINE

You were out all night last Monday. Didn't you see it then?

PIERROT

No, I was playing poker. I think I shall get up.

COLUMBINE

I've finished my breakfast.

PIERROT

Isn't that fine! Just in time to get me mine!

COLUMBINE

I shall do nothing of the sort.

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PIERROT (*pleading*)

But, Columbine, dear! I'm so hungry. I've had nothing to eat since two o'clock—and now it's eleven.

COLUMBINE

!

You should have gotten up when I called you!

PIERROT

My Columbine angry with me? Don't be angry, sweetheart. Your mouth is like a red rosebud when you smile—but when you're angry it gets thin, like a long, red worm.

COLUMBINE

Ugh! How can you say my mouth's like a worm!

PIERROT (*struck with the thought*)

A worm may hide in the reddest rose!

COLUMBINE

I'm angry with you!

PIERROT

I didn't say your mouth was like that. (*Gaily*)

I meant I wanted you to smile—to be happy.

It's morning, the sun is up!

COLUMBINE

It's been up for hours.

PIERROT (*gaily jumping out of bed*)

And so am I! Here is your penitent Pierrot! If you'll only forgive me, I'll go to bed early, sleep all night, get up with the dawn, and bring you your breakfast in bed! Won't you like that? (*He takes off his pyjama jacket, disclosing his costume underneath.*)

COLUMBINE

It would be lovely—but it'll never happen!

Goodness me, you've slept in your clothes!

FIVE ONE-ACT COMEDIES

PIERROT

Yes, I was too tired to take them off. Do they look bad?

COLUMBINE

The coat's creased terribly. I shall have to put the iron on. You can't go out looking like that! (*She goes over to the stove and puts on an iron.*)

PIERROT (*pulling on his stockings*)

Columbine, you are a dear! I don't deserve you. I know I don't. (*He looks around helplessly.*) Where are my shoes?

COLUMBINE

I don't know. I didn't take them off. Look where you least expect to find them.

(*Pierrot looks in his bed, under his pillow, and finally under the bed, where he finds them.*)

PIERROT

What are you going to give me for breakfast?

COLUMBINE

Would you like boiled eggs?

PIERROT (*with disgust*)

Eggs! Oh, Columbine, how could you suggest eggs? I want something dainty, something with a French name, that will waft its way gently into my insides.

COLUMBINE

I suppose you've been drinking!

PIERROT

Not more than was necessary!

COLUMBINE

I'll make you an omelette.

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PIERROT

The French name! And it must be a frothy one—clusters of air bubbles coated with egg!

COLUMBINE (*sighing*)

I shall have to dirty three extra dishes.

PIERROT

That makes me think of something. I know!
I haven't washed!

COLUMBINE (*breaking the eggs into a dish*)

Hurry, please! You'll begin to dress yourself just when I have everything ready for you.

PIERROT

Don't hurry me, Columbine. There should be something dignified about the way a man prepares himself for the day. If he hurries and skurries, it makes him fretful and nervous. A great opportunity may come to me today, if I preserve a calm in my soul. Would you have me miss it, just so as not to keep breakfast waiting for a few moments?

COLUMBINE

But you said you were hungry!

PIERROT

I am hungry. (*Rises.*) But I have a dignified hunger. I shall enter the bathroom with a stately air. Thus shall I begin the day and so shall I end it. (*Pierrot goes into the bathroom.*)

(*Columbine sighs, takes the egg-beater, mixes the omelette and pours it into a pan. She puts the coffee-pot back on the stove. Enter Pierrot, mopping his face with a towel. He dries it, then stands up and exercises listlessly for a few moments, using knife and fork as dumb-bells.*

FIVE ONE-ACT COMEDIES

He then tries rising up and down, hands on hips, body stiff; gets down but fails to rise; he staggers up. He repeats this twice, and finally falls into a chair at the table.)

PIERROT

Well! Where's the omelette?

COLUMBINE

It isn't ready yet.

PIERROT

I'm hungry.

COLUMBINE

Eat some bread.

PIERROT

Where is it?

COLUMBINE

Over here.

PIERROT

Well, why don't you bring it to me?

COLUMBINE

Can't you get it yourself?

PIERROT

Don't you see I'm sitting down to my breakfast? You've been hurrying me the whole morning, and now I'm here it isn't ready—.

COLUMBINE

It is ready. See, the omelette is done. (*She puts it on his plate.*)

PIERROT

Where's the salt?

COLUMBINE

Here you are!

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PIERROT

And the bread. Do bring the bread!

(She hands him the bread.)

COLUMBINE

You are bad tempered this morning.

PIERROT

I'm not. (*He eats the omelette ravenously.*)

COLUMBINE (*sitting at the table*)

Do you like the omelette?

PIERROT

It's all right. I nearly had that song. Listen:—

“Rose-colored Dawn,

My heart's forlorn—

Do you like that?

COLUMBINE

I don't. First of all, a dawn's not rose-colored; and, secondly, the idea's absolutely unoriginal!

PIERROT

You do tell the truth terribly!

COLUMBINE

You need someone to tell you the truth.

PIERROT

Those weren't the words I was thinking of in bed. If you don't like them, it's your own fault for waking me up. What I said just now was inspired by the omelette.

COLUMBINE

Don't be stupid, Pierrot. If I waked you up, it was because I had to. I've worked all the week and now it's your turn. There isn't a thing in the place to eat.

PIERROT

Wouldn't it be wonderful if we could school

FIVE ONE-ACT COMEDIES

ourselves to live without food; one could do it gradually. After all, material functions are merely matters of habit.

COLUMBINE

I wish you'd get the habit of working!

PIERROT (*hopelessly*)

Oh, dear! (*He stretches.*)

COLUMBINE

You kicked me—right on the leg!

PIERROT (*indifferently*)

Did I?

COLUMBINE

Yes. You might say you're sorry.

PIERROT (*sharply*)

I suppose I am sorry. Is it necessary to say so?

COLUMBINE (*indignantly*)

It certainly is!

PIERROT (*equally indignant*)

I might say equally, why did you have your leg in my way? My desire to stretch was frustrated —and by your leg!

COLUMBINE

Do you mean you're not sorry?

PIERROT

I mean that if your leg hadn't been there, I wouldn't have kicked it.

COLUMBINE (*angrily*)

Where should I put my leg?

PIERROT (*more angrily still*)

Somewhere where it wouldn't be *in my way!*

COLUMBINE (*rising*)

Look here, Pierrot, I've just about had enough of you. You don't care what you do, or what you say!

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PIERROT (*angrily*)

I suppose I don't! Well, I'm going. (*He puts on his hat.*)

COLUMBINE (*alarmed*)

Where are you going?

PIERROT (*bitterly*)

To work. To sell my immortality for a mess of pottage.

COLUMBINE

But I haven't ironed your coat—it is all creased.

You look disreputable.

PIERROT

I don't care how I look.

COLUMBINE

And you haven't finished your breakfast.

PIERROT

I'm not going to finish it.

(*He goes out, slamming the door. Columbine sits at the table and weeps. After a pause, enter Harlequin. He stands at the door.*)

HARLEQUIN (*with aplomb*)

Good morning!

COLUMBINE (*through her tears*)

Hello, Harlequin!

HARLEQUIN

Is that all you say to me, just "Hello"? Aren't you glad to see me?

COLUMBINE (*tearfully*)

Yes, Harlequin!

(*Harlequin approaches her.*)

HARLEQUIN

What's the matter? You're crying.

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COLUMBINE (*tearfully*)

Yes, Harlequin.

HARLEQUIN

Why are you crying? It's not over me, is it?

COLUMBINE

No, Harlequin.

HARLEQUIN (*disappointed*)

No? Oh! I thought it was!

COLUMBINE

Why, Harlequin?

HARLEQUIN

Well, I know I haven't been very nice to you lately. But it's all over now, Columbine. Tell me what you've been crying about.

COLUMBINE

I don't know.

(*Harlequin takes her hand.*)

HARLEQUIN (*sympathetically*)

Won't you tell Harlequin? Perhaps he can help you.

COLUMBINE

Oh, Harlequin, it's—it's Pierrot! (*She weeps again.*)

HARLEQUIN

It's too bad, dear. Pierrots are the same the world over. You may thank your stars that wherever there's a Pierrot, you'll always find a Harlequin for consolation!

COLUMBINE

I'd like you to console me, Harlequin, but I don't think it would be right.

HARLEQUIN

Oh, yes it would. Harlequins are quite neces-

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sary to the world. The Pierrots would be quite unbearable without them. And now tell me, what has Pierrot been doing?

COLUMBINE (*tearfully*)
It's what he hasn't been doing.

HARLEQUIN
Oh! Neglecting you!

COLUMBINE
Neglecting himself. Wasting his time. Going to parties, staying up late, working only when he has to. He's so—so inefficient with himself.

HARLEQUIN
Not with himself, Columbine, but with you. Columbine dear, if you were my wife, how I would devote myself to you! It would be the greatest pleasure for me to do little things for you, to make your life easier, instead of complicating it as Pierrot does. You make yourself a slave to him; you spoil him.

COLUMBINE
I know I do. He went away just now and left everything for me to do. The dishes aren't washed, the beds aren't made. He didn't get up till eleven o'clock!

HARLEQUIN
Eleven o'clock! (*With immense satisfaction.*) I've been up since five. What a way to treat you! Well, dear, I shall help you. Nobody can call *me* inefficient!

COLUMBINE
How I wish Pierrot had some of your qualities!

FIVE ONE-ACT COMEDIES

HARLEQUIN (*with still more satisfaction*)

He never will have. (*Jumps up.*) Shall we begin?

COLUMBINE

Begin what?

HARLEQUIN

Tidying up. I hate to sit in a room that's disorderly.

COLUMBINE (*coaxing*)

Oh, let's talk for a while. I don't feel like tidy-ing up yet.

HARLEQUIN

Don't you move! You stay right there. I'll do it. You've worked enough this morning.

COLUMBINE (*catches his arm*)

You are a dear to want to help me.

HARLEQUIN

There isn't anything I wouldn't do for you, Columbine. (*He bends his head down to her and kisses her.*)

COLUMBINE (*with a little cry of pleasure*)

Oh, Harlequin!

HARLEQUIN (*taking her hand*)

Columbine, dear, I love you. It's breaking my heart to see you so unhappy, to see your dear hands so hardened and stained by working and scrubbing for Pierrot, who doesn't appreciate you the very least little bit.

COLUMBINE (*weeps*)

It's true. He doesn't.

HARLEQUIN

He stays out night after night, drinking and gambling, and when he's so tired that he can do nothing else, he comes back to you and offers

MATINATA

you the dregs of himself. Columbine, you are too wonderful to be wasted on such a man.

COLUMBINE (*weepingly*)

I am! I know I am!

HARLEQUIN

Then leave him!

COLUMBINE (*amazed*)

Leave him?

HARLEQUIN

Yes, come with me.

COLUMBINE (*enthusiastically*)

Oh—an elopement!

HARLEQUIN

This wouldn't be an elopement exactly. We should have to go through the form of a legal separation.

COLUMBINE (*disappointed*)

But an elopement! I've always wanted an elopement!

HARLEQUIN

I know, dear, but you must really leave this to me. An elopement is very romantic and all that, but a legal separation is really the most sensible way of doing it.

COLUMBINE (*pouting*)

Very well, if you say so. I'm not sure I'm very keen about a legal separation. It sounds so—so—

HARLEQUIN (*interrupting*)

Practical. And that's just what it is.

COLUMBINE (*admiringly*)

You *are* practical, Harlequin. What do I have to do?

FIVE ONE-ACT COMEDIES

HARLEQUIN

Sit right down and leave everything to me. I shall attend to every detail.

COLUMBINE

You are a dear, Harlequin. (*She sits down on a chair by the table.*) Kiss me, sweetheart.

(*Harlequin bends over and kisses her.*)

HARLEQUIN (*still bending over her*)

This isn't very comfortable.

COLUMBINE (*rising*)

You sit here and let me sit on your lap. (*Harlequin sits down, and she sits on his knee.*) Tell me, Harlequin, how was it you came to fall in love with me?

HARLEQUIN (*starting*)

Oh, dear, I've put my sleeve in the omelette. I'm covered with egg. Do you mind if I clear off the table?

(*Columbine jumps off his knee and Harlequin rises.*)

COLUMBINE (*anxiously*)

Let me help you.

HARLEQUIN (*wiping his sleeve*)

No, I can manage, dear.

COLUMBINE

But, Harlequin!

HARLEQUIN

But, Columbine!

COLUMBINE

Oh, very well. (*She sits down.*)

HARLEQUIN

I'll clear them all off in a second.

MATINATA

(*He piles all the dishes on one arm, and in a few seconds has carried them all off, like an expert waiter.*)

COLUMBINE (*admiringly*)

How clever you are, Harlequin!

HARLEQUIN

While I'm up, I think I'll fix the beds.

COLUMBINE

But, Harlequin, what about the elopement?

HARLEQUIN (*rather sharply*)

The legal separation?

COLUMBINE

Yes, when shall we get started?

HARLEQUIN

When will Pierrot return?

COLUMBINE

I don't know.

HARLEQUIN

Didn't you ask him, dear?

COLUMBINE

No!

HARLEQUIN

That was rather thoughtless of you.

COLUMBINE

But, Harlequin, I didn't know we were going to elope when he left this morning.

HARLEQUIN

Of course, you didn't, but on general principles, if you're living with a person constantly, Columbine, you ought to know just about what his habits are, and how long he may be expected to be away.

FIVE ONE-ACT COMEDIES

COLUMBINE

But Pierrot has no habits.

HARLEQUIN

That's true. I suppose you'd better get packed,
so we can leave before he returns. Where is
your suitcase, dear?

COLUMBINE (*pointing*)

Under the bed.

HARLEQUIN (*pulls out the suitcase*)

Lord, what a state it's in! Have you a duster?

COLUMBINE

Let me do it.

HARLEQUIN

Please, Columbine. Tell me where you keep the
duster.

COLUMBINE

Please let me do it.

HARLEQUIN

Now, Columbine, didn't you say you'd leave
everything to me?

COLUMBINE

But I *want* to do it!

HARLEQUIN

Very well, I know what we'll do. You pack the
suitcase and I'll tidy the room.

(*Columbine takes the suitcase and dusts it with
her handkerchief.*)

HARLEQUIN

Using your handkerchief, dear?

COLUMBINE

I have no duster.

HARLEQUIN

No duster?

MATINATA

COLUMBINE

No!

HARLEQUIN (*expansively*)

When you are living with me, dear, we shall have large piles of dusters! We shall have small, striped ones, large tea cloths, dishcloths, towels, and washrags, and every kind of brush, broom, and cleaning appliance!

COLUMBINE

How wonderful!

HARLEQUIN (*begins making Pierrot's bed*)

Does Pierrot sleep in this bed?

COLUMBINE

Yes.

HARLEQUIN

I thought so. Nobody but Pierrot could stand such sheets.

COLUMBINE (*alarmed*)

They're clean, aren't they?

HARLEQUIN

Yes, but cotton, and such cotton! When you live with me, Columbine, you shall sleep on linen. What's this? (*He takes out a photograph of Columbine in a silver frame from under the pillow.*)

COLUMBINE (*taking the picture*)

Where did you find it?

HARLEQUIN

Under his pillow.

COLUMBINE

Silly Pierrot!

HARLEQUIN

Silly's too mild a name for a lazy sentimentalist like Pierrot. Sleeps with his wife's photograph!

FIVE ONE-ACT COMEDIES

COLUMBINE

Hadn't we better hurry?

HARLEQUIN

We can't go away and leave the place untidy—
though I suppose Pierrot would never notice it.

COLUMBINE

No—I don't think he would.

(Columbine begins to bundle her underwear and
clothes into the suitcase. Harlequin continues
making up the bed.)

HARLEQUIN (*making the bed*)

Do you tuck the quilt under the mattress on
both sides, or only on the left-hand side?

COLUMBINE (*carelessly*)

Oh, any old way.

HARLEQUIN (*dogmatically*)

The correct way is to tuck it under on the left-
hand side only. (Columbine attempts to close the
suitcase. Harlequin sees her.) Don't do that,
Columbine. You're liable to strain yourself.
Let me do it. (Harlequin begins to struggle
with the suitcase but fails to close it.) You have
too much in it. Do you mind if I open it?

COLUMBINE

But, Harlequin, we must hurry. Pierrot may
come back any moment.

HARLEQUIN

We can't go away with all your things trailing
out of the suitcase, dear! (He opens it and turns
to Columbine reproachfully.) Columbine!

COLUMBINE

Yes, it is untidy, isn't it? I was so excited I
just pushed everything in.

MATINATA

HARLEQUIN

No wonder I couldn't close it. Columbine, dear, just leave this packing to me, will you? Look, here's a magazine. (*He gives it to her and guides her to a chair.*) You sit down there and read it for a few minutes, and I'll have your suitcase packed like lightning.

COLUMBINE

But I feel so useless!

HARLEQUIN (*reproachfully*)

Columbine!

COLUMBINE

I do.

HARLEQUIN

But you want to go away with me, don't you, dear?

COLUMBINE (*dubiously*)

I suppose I do.

HARLEQUIN

You suppose? Don't you know, Columbine, darling?

COLUMBINE

Yes, of course I know.

HARLEQUIN

Very well. Leave everything to me and there won't be any hitch.

(*He begins packing up her clothes, which he has dumped out of the suitcase onto the floor. He is an expert packer; everything is folded up into the tiniest space. Columbine watches him apprehensively over the top of the magazine. Harlequin begins to fold up a very frilly nightgown.*)

FIVE ONE-ACT COMEDIES

COLUMBINE

Please don't look at that, Harlequin!

HARLEQUIN

Why not?

COLUMBINE

It embarrasses me.

HARLEQUIN

I've seen loads of them.

COLUMBINE

Harlequin!

HARLEQUIN

In shop windows. But isn't this rather a stupid one?

COLUMBINE

Pierrot doesn't think so.

HARLEQUIN

It is rather stupid, though. Look at all that frilly lace on the shoulders! It means that the gown lasts half as long. You are always liable to catch cold wearing it. Then again, the laundering is always more difficult and consequently more expensive, and it often scratches your skin when they put too much starch in it. (*His voice full of promise.*) I'll buy you some simple, practical ones, without any frills and fripperies.

COLUMBINE

But I like that one.

(*Harlequin has another frilly garment in his hand. She jumps up and takes it away from him.*)

HARLEQUIN (amazed)

Columbine, you don't mean to tell me you wear those!

MATINATA

COLUMBINE (*puzzled*)

Yes, I do; why not?

HARLEQUIN

Goodness me, they're mid-Victorian. You take me back to the days of my grandmother.

COLUMBINE

What's the matter with them?

HARLEQUIN

I shall have to buy you an entirely new trousseau!

COLUMBINE

I don't know that I want a new trousseau!

HARLEQUIN

Indeed you do. You need a new dress badly, too. When you live with me, I shall work hard and buy you loads of wonderful clothes. I shall select them myself. I want everybody to admire you and say what a faultlessly dressed woman you are! There! Everything's in, and there's room for a whole lot more. Are you sure you have everything?

COLUMBINE (*putting on her coat and hat*)

Quite sure. Come along.

HARLEQUIN

Did you remember to put in your rubbers?

COLUMBINE (*puzzled*)

Rubbers—on an elopement?

HARLEQUIN

Yes, why not? It might rain.

COLUMBINE

Well, I won't put in rubbers!

HARLEQUIN

If it rains, you'll take cold without them.

FIVE ONE-ACT COMEDIES

COLUMBINE

I will *not* take rubbers.

HARLEQUIN

Columbine, I insist on rubbers.

COLUMBINE (*sarcastically*)

Very well, I *have* no rubbers. But I have an umbrella—perhaps you'd like me to take that!

HARLEQUIN

That would be an excellent idea!

COLUMBINE (*getting angry*)

And how about a small medicine chest with mustard plasters, hot water bottles, and all the necessary equipment for treating small wounds, sprains, bruises, burns, and chapped hands?

HARLEQUIN

Columbine, I believe you are angry with me.

COLUMBINE

Angry with you? No, Harlequin, I'm not angry with you. I'm angry with myself. Imagine eloping with a man who insists on packing rubbers and an umbrella. Oh, Lord!

HARLEQUIN

My dear, I'm simply trying to be practical!

COLUMBINE (*scornfully*)

Practical! Why haven't you brought a lawyer with you? Why haven't we signed the necessary legal documents? Why haven't you brought a doctor in case we have an accident, and a trained nurse, and a hospital, and an ambulance? Why haven't you been really practical?

HARLEQUIN

Columbine, you're making fun of me!

COLUMBINE

No, I'm not! If I elope, it must be with a

MATINATA

practical man, not an amateur. I want him to bring along railroad trains and seaside hotels and ocean liners!

HARLEQUIN

You *are* making fun of me! Columbine, I shall *not* go away with you.

COLUMBINE (*points to the sink*)

How could you go away with me when the dishes aren't washed? (*A noise is heard outside.*) Hist! It's Pierrot!

HARLEQUIN

What shall I do?

COLUMBINE

Something practical!

HARLEQUIN

I'll hide in the bathroom.

(*Harlequin goes off into the bathroom. Columbine takes off her hat and coat and passes Harlequin's hat and walkingstick into the bathroom.*

Enter Pierrot. He carries a small straggling bunch of flowers.)

PIERROT (*penitently*)

Columbine, dear, these are for you!

COLUMBINE

Pierrot, dear! (*They embrace.*)

PIERROT

Forgive me, darling!

COLUMBINE

There's nothing to forgive, dearest.

PIERROT

I was rude to you!

FIVE ONE-ACT COMEDIES

COLUMBINE

It was my fault, Pierrot. I had my leg in your way!

PIERROT

No, dearest, I was wrong in kicking my foot against you! I know I was. So I went out into the fields and picked these flowers for you. Then I sat on the grass and looked at them, and do you know, Columbine, dear, that the song came back to me, the one I was dreaming about when you woke me up this morning—"Matinata" I called it—so I wrote it down on a piece of paper and took it to the song publishers and would you believe it—they paid me ninety dollars and forty-seven cents for it!

COLUMBINE (*amazed*)

And forty-seven cents!

PIERROT

Three dollars and seven cents a line! Look, here's the money! (*He pulls out the roll of bills and shows them to her.*) Do you know what I'm going to do with it? I'm going to buy half a dozen of the laciest of lace nighties for you! The ones you have are nearly worn out.

COLUMBINE

But, darling, they are so impractical!

PIERROT

They're beautiful! And then I'm going to bring you half a dozen pairs of—

COLUMBINE (*glancing apprehensively at the bathroom door*)

Never mind, Pierrot!

PIERROT

And with the rest of the money we'll go on a

MATINATA

little trip together! You'll have to pack your suitcase!

COLUMBINE (*shows her suitcase*)

It is packed!

PIERROT

How did you come to do that?

COLUMBINE (*hesitating, then lying heroically*)

Woman's intuition! The moment you said those few lines at the breakfast table, I just knew the publisher would buy the song!

PIERROT

Have you any room for my things?

COLUMBINE (*opens the suitcase*)

Lots!

PIERROT (*admiringly*)

How neatly you packed it! Here, drop these in.

(*He throws in some clothes and shuts the suitcase, stamps on it and goes to the door, right. Columbine puts on her hat and picks up the suitcase.*)

PIERROT

Columbine, you look charming in those old clothes. People will think we're eloping!

(*They kiss. Pierrot goes out. The bathroom door opens and Harlequin peeps through.*)

COLUMBINE (*calls downstairs, looking at Harlequin*)

Pierrot, dear, shall I bring rubbers?

(*Columbine goes out. Enter Harlequin. He looks out of the window, sighs, goes over to the table, shrugs his shoulders, and begins to wash the dishes.*)

CURTAIN

ANOTHER WAY OUT

A COMEDY IN ONE ACT

ANOTHER WAY OUT was first produced in November
1916, by the Washington Square Players at the
Comedy Theatre, New York, with the following cast:

MARGARET MARSHALL	GLADYS WYNNE
MRS. ABBEY	JEAN ROBB
POMEROY PENDLETON	JOSE RUBEN
BARONESS DE MEAUVILLE	HELEN WESTLEY
CHARLES P. K. FENTON	ROBERT STRANGE

Produced under the direction of **MR. PHILIP MOELLER**

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ANOTHER WAY OUT

SCENE

The studio in Pendleton's apartment. A large room, with skylight in center of wall, doors center, right, and left, table set for breakfast; a vase with red flowers decorates the table. Center rear wall, in front of skylight, a modelling stand, upon which is placed a rough statuette, covered with cloth. To one side of this is a large screen. The furnishings are many-hued, the cushions a flare of color, and the pictures fantastically futuristic.

Mrs. Abbey, a benevolent-looking, middle-aged woman, in neat clothes and apron, is arranging some dishes on the table. Margaret, a very modern young woman, is exercising vigorously. She is decidedly good-looking. Her eyes are direct, her complexion fresh, and her movements free. Her brown hair is bobbed, and she wears a picturesque Grecian robe.

MRS. ABBEY

Breakfast is ready, ma'am.

(Margaret sits at the table and helps herself. Mrs. Abbey goes out, left.)

MARGARET (calling)

Pommy, dear. Breakfast is on the table.

PENDLETON (from without)

I'll be there in a moment.

FIVE ONE-ACT COMEDIES

(*Margaret glances through the paper; Pendleton enters, door right. He is tall and thin, and of æsthetic appearance. His long blond hair is brushed loosely over his forehead and he is dressed in a heliotrope dressing gown. He lights a cigarette.*)

MARGARET

I thought you were going to stop smoking before breakfast.

PENDETON

My dear, I can't possibly stand the taste of tooth-paste in my mouth all day.

(*Pendleton sits at the table. Enter Mrs. Abbey, door left, with a tray. Pendleton helps himself, then drops his knife and fork with a clang. Mrs. Abbey and Margaret are startled.*)

MRS. ABBEY

Anything the matter, sir?

PENDETON

Dear, dear! My breakfast is quite spoiled again.

MRS. ABBEY (*concerned*)

Spoiled, sir?

PENDETON (*pointing to the red flowers on the breakfast table*)

Look at those flowers, Mrs. Abbey. Not only are they quite out of harmony with the color scheme of this room, but they're positively red, and you know I have a perfect horror of red.

MRS. ABBEY

But you like them that color sometimes, sir. What am I to do when you're so temperamental about 'em.

ANOTHER WAY OUT

MARGARET

Temperamental. I should say bad tempered.

MRS. ABBEY (*soothingly*)

Oh, no, ma'am. It isn't bad temper. I understand Mr. Pendleton. It's just another bad night he's had, that's what it is.

PENDLETON (*sarcastically polite*)

Mrs. Abbey, you appear to have an intimate knowledge of how I pass the nights. It's becoming quite embarrassing.

MRS. ABBEY

You mustn't mind an old woman like me, sir.

(*The sound of a piano, hopelessly out of tune, in the apartment upstairs, is heard, the player banging out Mendelssohn's Wedding March with unusual insistence.*)

PENDLETON

There! That confounded piano again!

MARGARET

And they always play the Wedding March.
There must be an old maid living there.

MRS. ABBEY

They're doing that for a reason.

MARGARET

What reason?

MRS. ABBEY

Their cook told me yesterday that her missus thinks if she keeps on a-playing of the Wedding March, p'raps it'll give you an' Mr. Pendleton the idea of getting married. She don't believe in couples livin' together, like you an' Mr. Pendleton.

FIVE ONE-ACT COMEDIES

MARGARET

No?

MRS. ABBEY

And I just said you an' Mr. Pendleton had been living together so long, it was my opinion you might just as well be married an' done with it.

MARGARET (*angrily*)

Your opinion is quite uncalled for, Mrs. Abbey.

PENDLETON

Why shouldn't Mrs. Abbey give us her opinion? It may be valuable. Look at her experiences in matrimony.

MRS. ABBEY

In matrimony, and out of it, too.

MARGARET (*sitting*)

But Mrs. Abbey has no right to discuss our affairs with other people's maids.

MRS. ABBEY

I'll be glad to quit if I don't suit the mistress.

MARGARET (*angrily*)

There! "Mistress" again! How often have I asked you not to refer to me as the mistress?

MRS. ABBEY

No offense, ma'am.

PENDLETON

You'd better see if there's any mail, Mrs. Abbey, and take those flowers away with you.

MRS. ABBEY

Very well, sir.

(*Mrs. Abbey goes off, door center.*)

MARGARET

What an old-fashioned point of view Mrs. Abbey has.

ANOTHER WAY OUT

(*Pendleton takes up the paper and commences to read.*)

MARGARET

Pommy, why do you stoop so?

PENDLETON

Am I stooping?

MARGARET

I'm tired of telling you. You ought to take more exercise. (*Pendleton continues to read.*) One reason why the Greeks were the greatest of artists was because they cultivated the body as carefully as the mind.

PENDLETON

Oh! Hang the Greeks!

(Enter Mrs. Abbey, door center, with letters.)

MRS. ABBEY

These are your letters, sir. (*Coldly.*) And these are yours, ma'am. (*She goes off, left.*)

MARGARET (*who has opened her letters meanwhile*) How delightful! Tom Del Valli has asked us to a party at his studio next Friday.

PENDLETON (*opening his letters*)

Both of us?

MARGARET (*giving him the letter*)

Yes, and Helen Marsden wants us for Saturday.

PENDLETON

Both of us?

MARGARET (*picking up another letter*)

Yes, and here's one from Bobby Watson for Sunday.

PENDLETON

Both of us?

FIVE ONE-ACT COMEDIES

MARGARET

Yes.

PENDLETON

Really, Margaret, this is becoming exasperating.
(*Holds up the letters.*) Here are four more, I suppose for both of us. People keep on inviting us out together time after time as though we were the most conventional married couple on God's earth.

MARGARET

Do you object to going out with me?

PENDLETON (*doubtfully*)

No, it isn't that. But we're having too much of a good thing. And I've come to the conclusion that it's your fault.

MARGARET (*indignantly*)

Oh, it's my fault? Of course you'd blame me. Why?

PENDLETON

Because you have such an absurd habit of boasting to people of your devotion to me, when we're out.

MARGARET

You surely don't expect me to quarrel with you in public?

PENDLETON

It isn't necessary to go to that extent. But when everybody believes that we're utterly, almost stupidly in love with one another, what can you expect?

MARGARET

You said once you never wanted me to suppress anything.

ANOTHER WAY OUT

PENDLETON

That was before we began to live together.

MARGARET

What could I have done?

PENDLETON

Anything, just so we could have a little more freedom, instead of being tied to one another the way we are. Never a moment when we're not together, never a day when I'm not interviewed by special article writers from almost every paper and magazine in the country as the only successful exponent of the theory that love can be so perfect that the marriage contract degrades it. I put it up to you, Margaret —if this *is* a free union, it is simply intolerable!

MARGARET

But aren't we living together so as to have more freedom? Think of what it might be if we were married. Didn't you once write, "When marriage comes in at the door, freedom flies out at the window"?

PENDLETON

Are we any better off, with everybody treating us as though we were living together to prove a principle?

MARGARET

Well, aren't we, incidentally? You said so yourself. We can be a beautiful example to other people, and show them how to lead the pure, natural lives of the later Greeks.

PENDLETON

Damn the later Greeks! Why do you always throw those confounded later Greeks in my

FIVE ONE-ACT COMEDIES

face? We've got to look at it from our stand-point. This situation must come to an end.

MARGARET

What can we do?

PENDLETON

It rests with you.

MARGARET

With me?

PENDLETON

You can compromise yourself with somebody publicly. That'll put an end to everything.

MARGARET

How will that end it?

PENDLETON

It'll break down the morally sanctified atmosphere in which we're living. Then, perhaps, people will regard us as immoral—and treat us like decent human beings again.

MARGARET

But I don't want to compromise myself.

PENDLETON

If you believe in your own ideals, you must.

MARGARET

But why should I have to do it?

PENDLETON

It will be so easy for you.

MARGARET

Why can't we both be compromised? That would be better still.

PENDLETON

I should find it a bore. You, unless my memory fails me, would enjoy it.

ANOTHER WAY OUT

MARGARET

You needn't be cynical. Even if you don't enjoy it, you can work it into a novel.

PENDLETON

It's less exertion to imagine an affair of that sort, and the result would probably be more saleable. Besides I have no interest whatsoever in women—at least, in the women we know.

MARGARET

For that matter, I don't know any eligible men.

PENDLETON

What about Bob Lockwood?

MARGARET

But he's your best friend!

PENDLETON

Exactly. No man ever really trusts his best friend. He'll probably compromise you without compunction.

MARGARET

I'm afraid he'd be too dangerous; he tells you all his secrets. Whom would you choose?

PENDLETON

It's a matter of complete indifference to me.

MARGARET

I've heard a lot of queer stories about Jean Roberts. How would she do?

PENDLETON (*firmly*)

Margaret, I don't mind being party to a flirtation—but I draw the line at being the victim of a seduction.

MARGARET

Why not leave it to chance? Let it be the next interesting woman you meet.

FIVE ONE-ACT COMEDIES

PENDLETON

That might be amusing. But there must be an age limit. And how about you?

MARGARET (*takes the cloth off the statuette and discloses a figure of Apollo in rough modelling clay*)
Me! Why not the new model who is coming today to pose for my Apollo?

PENDLETON

Well, if he's anything like that, you ought to be able to create a sensation. Then, perhaps, we shall have some real freedom.

MARGARET

Pommy, do you still love me as much as you did?

PENDLETON

How you sentimentalize! Do you think I'd be willing to enter into a flirtation with a strange woman, if I didn't want to keep on living with you?

MARGARET

And we won't have to break up our little home, will we?

PENDLETON

No, anything to save the home. (*Catches himself.*) My God! If any of my readers should hear me say that! To think that I, Pomeroy Pendleton, should be trying to save my own home. And yet, how characteristically paradoxical.

MARGARET (*interrupting*)

You are going to philosophize! Give me a kiss.

(*She goes to him, sits on his lap, and places her arm on his shoulder; he takes out a cigarette, she lights it for him.*)

ANOTHER WAY OUT

PENDLETON (*brought back to reality*)
I have some work to do. I must go.

MARGARET
A kiss!

PENDLETON (*kisses her carelessly*)
There, let me go.

MARGARET
I want a real kiss.

PENDLETON
Don't be silly, dear. I can't play this morning.
I've simply got to finish my last chapter.

(*A bell rings. Mrs. Abbey enters and goes to the center door.*)

MRS. ABBEY
There's a lady to see Mr. Pendleton.

MARGARET
Tell her to come in!

PENDLETON
But, Margaret!

MARGARET
Remember! (*Significantly.*) The first woman you meet!

(*Margaret goes out, right. Mrs. Abbey enters center with Baroness de Meauville. Mrs. Abbey goes out, left.*)

BARONESS DE MEAUVILLE (*speaking with a pronounced English accent*)
Good morning, Mr. Pendleton, I'm the Baroness de Meauville!

PENDLETON (*recalling her name*)
Baroness de Meauville? Ah, the costumer?

FIVE ONE-ACT COMEDIES

BARONESS

Not a costumer, Mr. Pendleton. I am an artist, an artist in modern attire. A woman is to me what a canvas is to a painter.

PENDLETON

Excuse me for receiving you in my dressing gown. I was at work.

BARONESS

I like to see men in dressing gowns—yours is very charming.

PENDLETON (*flattered and pleased*)

Do you like it? I designed it myself.

BARONESS (*looking seductively into his eyes*)

How few really creative artists there are in America!

PENDLETON (*modestly*)

You flatter me.

BARONESS

Not at all. You must know that I'm a great admirer of yours, Mr. Pendleton. I've read every one of your books. I feel I know you as an old friend.

PENDLETON

That's very nice of you!

(*The baroness reclines on the couch; takes a jewelled cigarette case from her reticule, and offers Pendleton a cigarette.*)

BARONESS

Will you smoke?

PENDLETON

Thanks.

(*Pendleton lights her cigarette, then his own. He*

ANOTHER WAY OUT

draws his chair up to the couch. An atmosphere of mutual interest is established.)

BARONESS

Mr. Pendleton, I have a mission in life. It is to make the American woman the best-dressed woman in the world. I came here today because I want you to help me.

PENDLETON

But I have no ambitions in that direction.

BARONESS

Why should you have ambitions? Only the bourgeoisie has ambitions. We artists have inspirations. I want to breathe into you the spirit of my great undertaking. Already I have opened my place in the smartest part of the Avenue. Already I have drawn my assistants from all parts of the world. Nothing is lacking to complete my plans—but you.

PENDLETON

Me? Why me?

BARONESS (*endearingly*)

Are you not considered one of the foremost men of letters in America?

PENDLETON (*modestly*)

Didn't you say you had read all my books?

BARONESS

Are you not the only writer who has successfully portrayed the emotional side of American life?

PENDLETON (*decidedly*)

Yes.

FIVE ONE-ACT COMEDIES

BARONESS

Exactly. That is why I have chosen you to write my advertisements.

PENDLETON (*aghast*)

But, Baroness!

BARONESS

You're not going to say that. It's so ordinary.

PENDLETON

But—but—you want *me* to write advertisements!

BARONESS

Please don't disappoint me. Why, you might even evolve a new form of literature.

PENDLETON

Yes, I suppose that's so. But one has a sense of pride.

BARONESS

Art comes before Pride. Consider my feelings, an aristocrat, coming here to America and engaging in commerce, and advertising, and other dreadful things, and all for the sake of Art!

PENDLETON

But you make money out of it!

BARONESS

Only incidentally. Just as you, in writing my advertisements, would make, say ten thousand or so, as a sort of accident. But don't let us talk of money. It's perfectly revolting, isn't it? Art is Life, and I believe in Life for Art's sake. That's why I am a success.

PENDLETON

Indeed? How interesting. Please go on.

BARONESS

When a woman comes to me for a gown, I don't

ANOTHER WAY OUT

measure her body. Why should I? I measure her mind. I find her color harmony. In a moment I can tell whether she ought to wear scarlet, mauve, taupe, magenta, or any other color, so as to fall into her proper rhythm. Everyone has a rhythm, you know. (*Pendleton sits on the sofa.*) But I don't have to explain all this to you, Mr. Pendleton. You understand it intuitively. This heliotrope you are wearing shows me at once that you are in rhythm.

PENDLETON (*thinking of Margaret*)

I'm not so sure that I am. What you say interests me. May I ask you a question?

BARONESS

Yes, but I may not answer it.

PENDLETON

Why do you wear heliotrope, and the same shade as mine?

BARONESS (*with mock mystery*)

You mustn't ask me that.

PENDLETON

I'm all curiosity.

BARONESS

Curiosity is dangerous.

PENDLETON

Supposing I try to find out.

BARONESS

That may be even more dangerous.

PENDLETON (*taking her hand*)

I'm fond of that kind of danger.

BARONESS

Take care! I'm very fragile.

FIVE ONE-ACT COMEDIES

PENDLETON

Isn't heliotrope in rhythm with the faint reflection of passion?

BARONESS

How brutal of you to have said it.

PENDLETON (*coming closer to her*)

I, too, am in rhythm with heliotrope.

BARONESS (*with joy*)

How glad I am. Thank God, you've no desire to kiss my lips.

PENDLETON

Only your finger-tips. (*They exchange kisses and finger-tips.*) Your fingers are like soft, pale, waxen tapers!

BARONESS

Your kisses are the breathings that light them into quivering flame!

PENDLETON

Exquisite—exquisite!

BARONESS (*withdrawing her hands*)

That was a moment!

PENDLETON

We must have many such.

BARONESS

Many? That's too near too much.

PENDLETON (*fervently*)

We shall, dear lady.

BARONESS

How I adore your writings! They have made me realize the beauty of an ideal union, the love of one man for one woman—at a time. Let us have such a union, you and me.

PENDLETON (*taken aback*)

But I live in such a union already.

ANOTHER WAY OUT

BARONESS (*horror-stricken*)

What! You live in such a union! (*She rises.*)
Don't you see what we've done? You are living
in one of those wonderful unions you de-
scribe in your books—and I've let you kiss me.
I've committed a sacrilege.

PENDLETON

You're mistaken. It isn't a sacrilege. It's
an opportunity.

BARONESS (*dramatically*)

How can you say that—you, whose words have
inspired my deepest intimacies. No, I must go.
(*She makes for the door, center.*) I—must—go.

PENDLETON

You don't understand. I exaggerated every-
thing so in my confounded books.

BARONESS

Please ask *her* to forgive me. Please tell her
I thought you were married, otherwise, never,
never, would I have permitted you to kiss me.

PENDLETON

What made you think I was married?

BARONESS

One often believes what one hopes.

PENDLETON

You take it too seriously. Let me explain.

BARONESS

What is there to explain? Our experience has
been complete. Why spoil it by anti-climax?

PENDLETON

Am I never to see you again?

BARONESS

Who knows? If your present union should end,
and some day your soul needs—some one?

FIVE ONE-ACT COMEDIES

(*She goes out, door, center, her manner full of promise.*)

PENDLETON (*with feeling*)

Goodbye, long, pale fingers.

(*Enter Margaret, door, right.*)

MARGARET

Did you get a good start with the scandal?

PENDLETON

Not exactly. I may as well admit it was a failure, through no fault of mine, of course. And now, I simply must finish that last chapter.
(*He goes off.*)

(*Margaret rings. Mrs. Abbey enters.*)

MARGARET

You may clear, Mrs. Abbey.

MRS. ABBEY

Very well, ma'am. (*She attends to clearing the table.*)

MARGARET

Mrs. Abbey, have you worked for many people living together, like Mr. Pendleton and myself?

MRS. ABBEY

Lor', ma'am, yes. I've worked in nearly every house on the south side of Washington Square.

MARGARET

Mr. Pendleton says I'm as domestic as any wife could be. Were the others like me?

MRS. ABBEY

Most of them, ma'am; but some was regular hussies, not only a-livin' with their fellers—

ANOTHER WAY OUT

but havin' a good time, too. That's what I call real immoral.

(*A bell rings. Mrs. Abbey opens door, center, and passes out. Conversation with Fenton without is heard. Mrs. Abbey comes back.*)

MRS. ABBEY

A young man wants to see you, ma'am.

MARGARET

That's the new model. I'll get my working apron.

(*Margaret goes out, door, right. Mrs. Abbey calls through door, center.*)

MRS. ABBEY

You c'n come in.

(*Enter door, center, Charles P. K. Fenton, dictionary salesman. He is a strikingly handsome young man, offensively smartly dressed in a black-and-white check suit, gaudy tie, and white socks. His hair is brushed back from his forehead like a glossy sheath. He carries a small black bag. His manner is distinctly "male."*)

MRS. ABBEY (*points to the screen*)

You can undress behind there.

FENTON

Undress? Say, what's this? A Turkish bath?

MRS. ABBEY

Did you expect to have a private room all to yourself?

FENTON (*looking around*)

What am I to undress for?

MRS. ABBEY

The missus will be here in a minute.

FIVE ONE-ACT COMEDIES

FENTON

Good-night! I'm goin'! (*He makes for the door.*)

MRS. ABBEY

What's the matter? Ain't you the missus' new model?

FENTON

A model! Ha, ha! You've sure got the wrong number this time. I'm in the dictionary line, ma'am.

MRS. ABBEY

Well, of all the impudence! You a book agent, and a-walkin' in here.

FENTON

Well, you asked me in, didn't you? Can't I see the missus, just for a minute?

MRS. ABBEY (*good-naturedly*)

Very well. (*Confidentially*) I advise you to remove that Spearmint from your mouth, if you want to sell any dictionaries in this house.

FENTON (*placing his hand to his mouth*)

Where shall I put it?

MRS. ABBEY

You'd better swallow it!

(*Fenton tries to do so, chokes, turns red, and places his hand to his mouth. Margaret enters door, right.*)

MARGARET (*to Fenton*)

I'm so glad to see you.

(*Fenton is most embarrassed. Mrs. Abbey, in surprise, attempts to explain the situation.*)

MRS. ABBEY

But, ma'am—

ANOTHER WAY OUT

MARGARET

You may go, Mrs. Abbey.

MRS. ABBEY

But, but, ma'am—

MARGARET (*severely*)

You may go, Mrs. Abbey. (*Mrs. Abbey leaves in a huff.*) I'm so glad they sent you up to see me. Won't you sit down?

(*Fenton finds it a difficult matter to handle the situation. He adopts his usual formula for an "opening," but his speech is mechanical and without conviction. Margaret adds to his embarrassment by stepping around him and examining him with professional interest.*)

FENTON

Madam, I represent the Globe Advertising Publishing Sales Company, the largest publishers of dictionaries in the world.

MARGARET (*continuing to appraise him*)

Then you're not the new model?

FENTON

No, ma'am.

MARGARET

What a pity! Never mind, go on.

FENTON

As I was saying, ma'am, I represent the Advertising Globe Publishing—I mean the Globe Advertising Publishing Sales Company, the largest publishers of dictionaries in the world. For some time past we have felt that there was a demand for a new Encyclopædic Dictionary, madam, one that would not only fill up a good deal of space on the bookshelf, making an at-

FIVE ONE-ACT COMEDIES

tractive addition to the home, but also containing the most complete collection of words in the English language.

(Margaret has taken a pencil and is measuring Fenton while he speaks. Fenton's discomfort is obvious. He attempts to rearrange his tie and coat, thinking she is examining them.)

MARGARET

Please go on talking, it's so interesting.

FENTON

Statistics show that the woman of average education in America, madam, has command of but fifteen hundred words. This new dictionary, madam (*producing a book from his bag*), will give you command of over eight hundred and fifty thousand.

MARGARET (*archly*)

So you are a dealer in words—how perfectly romantic.

FENTON (*warming*)

Most of these words, madam, are not used more than a dozen times a year. They are our Heritage from the Past, ma'am, just as our flag is our heritage. And all these words, to say nothing of the fact that the dictionary fills five inches on a bookshelf, making an attractive addition to your library, being handsomely bound in half-cloth, all these are yours, ma'am, for the price of one dollar.

(He places a dictionary in her hand. She examines it.)

ANOTHER WAY OUT

FENTON

If you have a son, madam, the possession of this dictionary will give him an opportunity of acquiring that knowledge of our language which made Abraham Lincoln the Father of Our Country. Madam, opportunity knocks at the door only once, and *this is your opportunity*, at one dollar.

MARGARET (*meaningly*)

Yes, this is my opportunity! I'll buy the dictionary, and now (*sweetly*) won't you tell me your name?

FENTON (*pocketing the dollar*)

My name is Charles P. K. Fenton.

MARGARET

Mr. Fenton, would you mind doing me a favor?

FENTON (*looking dubiously toward the screen*)

Why, I guess not, madam.

MARGARET

I want you to take off your coat.

FENTON (*puzzled*)

You're not trying to kid me, ma'am?

MARGARET

I just want to see your development. Do you mind?

FENTON (*removes his coat*)

Why, no, ma'am, if that's all you want.

MARGARET

Now, bring your arm up, tighten the muscles. (*Fenton does as she bids; Margaret thumps his arm approvingly.*) Splendid! You must take lots of exercise, Mr. Fenton.

FIVE ONE-ACT COMEDIES

FENTON

Not me, ma'am. I never had no time for exercise. I got that workin' in a freight yard.

MARGARET

I suppose you think me rather peculiar, Mr. Fenton.

FENTON

You've said it, ma'am.

MARGARET

You see, I'm a sculptress. (*She points to the statuette.*) This is my work.

FENTON

You made that? Gee! That's great. (*He examines the statuette.*) Just like them statues at the Metropolitan.

MARGARET

That center figure is Apollo, Mr. Fenton.

FENTON (*vaguely*)

Oh—Apollo!

MARGARET

I was to engage a professional model for it, but I could never hope to get a professional as fine a type as you. Will you pose for it?

FENTON (*aghast*)

Me? That feller there without any clothes?

(*Dubiously*) Well, I don't know. It's kind of chilly here.

MARGARET

If I draped you, it would spoil some of your lines. (*Seeing his hesitation.*) But I will if you like.

FENTON (*relieved*)

Ah, now you're talking.

ANOTHER WAY OUT

MARGARET

So you'll really come?

FENTON

How about this evening?

MARGARET

Splendid! Sit down. (*Fenton does so.*) Mr. Fenton, you've quite aroused my curiosity. I know so few business men. Is your work interesting?

FENTON

Well, I can't say it was, until I started selling around this neighborhood.

MARGARET

Is it difficult?

FENTON

Not if you've got personality, ma'am. That's the thing, personality. If a feller hasn't got personality, he can't sell goods, that's sure.

MARGARET

What do you mean by personality, Mr. Fenton?

FENTON

Well, it's what sells the goods. I don't know how else to explain it, exactly. I'll look it up in the dictionary. (*He takes a dictionary and turns the pages.*) Here it is, ma'am. Per—per—why, it isn't in here. I guess they don't put in words that everybody knows. We all know what personality means. It's what sells the goods.

MARGARET

I adore a strong, virile, masculine personality.

FENTON

I don't quite get you, madam.

FIVE ONE-ACT COMEDIES

MARGARET

The men I know have so much of the feminine in them.

FENTON

Oh,—“sissies”!

MARGARET (*flirtingly*)

They lack the magnetic forcefulness which I like so much in you.

FENTON

I believe you *are* kidding me. Does that mean you like me?

MARGARET

That's rather an embarrassing question.

FENTON

You must or you wouldn't let me speak to you in this way.

MARGARET (*archly*)

Never mind whether I like you. Tell me whether you like me.

FENTON (*feeling more at home*)

Gee! I didn't get on to you at first. Sure I like you.

MARGARET

Then we're going to be good friends.

FENTON

You just bet we are. Say, got a date for tomorrow evening?

MARGARET

No.

FENTON

How about the movies? There's a fine feature film at the Strand. Theda Bara in “The Lone-some Vampire,” five reels. They say it's got “Gloria's Romance” beat a mile.

ANOTHER WAY OUT

MARGARET

I don't know that I'd care to go there.

FENTON

How about a run down to Coney?

MARGARET (*ecstatically*)

Coney! I've always wanted to do wild pagan things!

FENTON

Say, you'll tell me your name, won't you?

MARGARET

Margaret Marshall.

FENTON

Do you mind if I call you Margie?

MARGARET

If you do, I must call you—

FENTON

Charley. Gee, I like the name of Margie. Some class to that!

MARGARET

I'm glad you like it.

FENTON (*moving closer*)

And some class to you!

MARGARET (*coyly*)

So you really like me?

FENTON

You bet. Say, before I go, you've got to give me a kiss, Margie.

MARGARET

Well, I don't know. Aren't you rather "rushing" me?

FENTON

Say, you are a kidder. (*He draws her up from her chair, and kisses her warmly on the lips.*)

FIVE ONE-ACT COMEDIES

MARGARET (*ecstatically*)

You have the true Greek spirit! (*They kiss again.*) If only Pommy would kiss me that way!

FENTON

Pommy? Who's Pommy?

MARGARET

Pommy is the man I live with.

FENTON

Your husband?

MARGARET

No, we just live together. You see, we don't believe in marriage.

FENTON (*pushing her away in horror*)

I thought there was something queer about all this. Does he live here?

MARGARET

Yes. (*Points to door, right.*) He's in there now.

FENTON (*excitedly*)

Good-night! I'm goin'. (*He looks for his hat.*)

MARGARET (*speaking with real anguish*)

You're surely not going just on that account.

FENTON (*taking hat and bag*)

Isn't that enough?

MARGARET (*emotionally*)

Please don't go. Listen. I can't suppress my feeling for you. I never do with anybody. I liked you the moment I saw you. I want you as a friend, a good friend. You can't go now, just when everything's about to begin.

FENTON (*severely*)

Fair's fair, Miss. If he's keeping you, you can't

ANOTHER WAY OUT

be taking up with *me* at the same time. That puts the finish on it.

MARGARET

But he doesn't keep me. I keep myself.

FENTON

Wait a minute. You support yourself and live with him of your own free will! Then you've got no excuse for being immoral. 'Tisn't like you had to make your living at it. (*At the door.*) Goodbye.

MARGARET

But I can explain everything.

FENTON

It's no use, Miss. Even though I am a salesman, I've got a sense of honor. I sized you up as a married woman when I came in just now, or I never would have made love to you at all.

MARGARET

Oh, wait! Supposing I should want to buy some more dictionaries?

FENTON (*returning*)

You've got my card, Miss. The phone number is on it. Bryant 4253. (*Sees Margaret hang her head.*) Don't feel hurt, Miss. You'll get over these queer ideas some day, and when you do, well, you've got my number. So long, Kid. (*Fenton goes out, door, center.*)

MARGARET (*taking his card from the table and placing it to her lips soulfully*)
My Apollo—Bryant 4253!

(*Enter Pendleton, door, right.*)

FIVE ONE-ACT COMEDIES

PENDLETON

Did you get a good start with your scandal?
(*Margaret hangs her head.*) It's no use. I'm
convinced we're in a hopeless muddle.

MARGARET

I heartily agree with you.

PENDLETON

You've changed your mind very suddenly.

MARGARET

I have my reasons.

PENDLETON

The fact is, Margaret, that so long as we live
together we're public figures, with everybody
else as our jury.

MARGARET

But lots of people read your books and respect
us.

PENDLETON

The people that respect us are worse than the
people that don't.

MARGARET

If they wouldn't always be bothering about our
morals!

PENDLETON

If we continue to live together, we shall simply
be giving up our freedom to prove we are free.

MARGARET (*faltering*)

I suppose we ought to separate.

PENDLETON

I believe we should.

MARGARET

We'll have to give up the studio.

PENDLETON (*regretfully*)

Yes.

ANOTHER WAY OUT

MARGARET

It's taken a long time to make the place home-like.

PENDLETON

We've been very comfortable here.

MARGARET

I shall miss you at meals.

PENDLETON

I shall have to start eating at clubs and restaurants again. No more good home cooking.

MARGARET

We're kind of used to one another, aren't we?

PENDLETON

It isn't an easy matter to break, after five years.

MARGARET

And there are mighty few studios with as good a light as this. I don't want to separate, if you don't.

PENDLETON

But, Margaret— (*Piano starts playing the Wedding March.*) There, that confounded piano again. (*Seized with an idea.*) Margaret, there's another way out!

MARGARET (*with the same idea*)

You mean, we ought to marry!

PENDLETON

Yes, marry, and do it at once. That'll end everything.

MARGARET

Let's do it right away and get it over with. I simply must finish my Apollo.

PENDLETON

I'm going to buy you a new gown to get married

FIVE ONE-ACT COMEDIES

in, a wedding present, from Baroness de Meauville's.

MARGARET

I don't know that I want a de Meauville gown.

PENDLETON

Please let me. I want to give you something to symbolize our new life together.

MARGARET

Very well. And in return, I'll buy you a dictionary, so that I won't have to keep on correcting your spelling.

(*Pendleton goes out, door, right. Margaret goes to the phone, and consults Fenton's card.*)

MARGARET

Bryant 4253? Can I speak to Mr. Fenton? (*Enter Mrs. Abbey.*) Mrs. Abbey, what do you think? We're going to get married!

MRS. ABBEY

Well, bless my soul! That's right. You can take it from me, ma'am, you'll find that *respectability pays*.

MARGARET (*at phone*)

Bryant 4253? (*Sweetly.*) Is that Mr. Fenton? (*Pause.*) Hello, Charley!

CURTAIN

THE FAMILY EXIT

A COMEDY IN ONE ACT

THE FAMILY EXIT was first produced in September, 1917,
at the Comedy Theatre, New York, with the following cast:

PETER RUTHERFORD-VANDUSEN	DAVID HIGGINS
RUTHERFORD RUTHERFORD-VANDUSEN	EDWIN FORSBERG
MARTHA RUTHERFORD-VANDUSEN	ALBERTA GALLATIN
CORNELIUS	JAMES DYRENFORTH
EUGENIA	FRANCES ROSS
MIKE O'ROURKE	FRANK E. JAMISON
ELISE	ALETHEA LUCE

Produced under the direction of Mr. PHILIP MOELLER

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THE FAMILY EXIT

SCENE

A room in the Immigration Office at Ellis Island. A bare, official-looking room, with doors right and left. The furnishings consist of a long table, a desk, and some chairs. On the table is a telephone, and on the desk, a large, ledger-like book.

Mike O'Rourke is a middle-aged Irish-American. He wears the uniform of an immigration officer.

Rutherford Rutherford-Vandusen is a pompous elderly gentleman, exceedingly well-dressed, and carrying himself always with the air of the American aristocrat. He is regarded as the head of the well-known Rutherford-Vandusen family, and never forgets this fact for a minute.

Martha, his wife, is of equal importance. She has reached a ripe middle age. She carries a lorgnette which she uses to advantage for the purpose of discomforting her social inferiors.

Cornelius is the product of three universities, from each of which he has been expelled in turn. As a result, he has been able to acquire the vices of all three. He has a winning, boyish manner, which makes him instantly popular. He is about twenty-five years old.

Eugenia is a young débutante, pretty but undeveloped.

FIVE ONE-ACT COMEDIES

Martha, Eugenia, Cornelius, and Rutherford are seated at the table. O'Rourke is sitting on a high stool at the desk.

RUTHERFORD (*to O'Rourke*)
Is this the best room you have?

O'ROURKE
Sure, sir. It's the best on Ellis Island! We call it the drawing-room, sir.

MARTHA (*sliding her finger over the top of the table, and examining the result through her lorgnette*)
This place hasn't been dusted for months.

O'ROURKE
It's them aliens, ma'am. You can't do nothin' wid aliens. Put a bunch of them in a clean room like this, and in a minute or two you will find it so full of dust, you'd think it never was cleaned in years.

CORNELIUS
That's queer. Where do they get the dust?

O'ROURKE
Like as not they bring it over wid them, sir.

RUTHERFORD
The conditions I find here are absolutely deplorable. I shall write a letter to the New York Times on the subject immediately on returning home.

CORNELIUS
Say, Dad, we didn't come to this hole to make a sanitary investigation, did we?

O'ROURKE (*going to the desk*)
I'll see if I can find the alien you're lookin' for.

THE FAMILY EXIT

RUTHERFORD (*indignantly*)

Is it necessary for me to tell you again that the gentleman I wish to see is not an alien. He is my brother!

O'ROURKE

I beg pardon, sir. I know just how you feel. My own brother, Patrick, was an alien once upon a time himself, and what an alien! One of the worst that ever came on the Island! Why, sir, he hadn't set foot on American soil more than half an hour before he started a fight and nearly killed a couple of Dagoes!

CORNELIUS (*much interested*)

He must have been a corker!

RUTHERFORD

I should hardly think a man of that type would make a very desirable citizen.

O'ROURKE (*to Rutherford*)

Beggan' your pardon, sir, that's where you're wrong. After he'd finished with the Wops, he yells, "Me for the land of liberty," and wid that he whales into a couple of Greasers, an' two or three Pollacks, till they called out the Fire Department, an' him cursin' and swearin' so blasphemous (beggin' your pardon, ma'am) that the Holy Father himself, who lives here on the Island, began yellin' paternosters to beat the devil!

RUTHERFORD

But—

O'ROURKE

Ah, Pat was a great one, sir. (*Deploringly.*) Aliens ain't like that nowadays. Them low Hungarians an' Greeks an' whatnot, ain't got

FIVE ONE-ACT COMEDIES

no Irish spirit in 'em. Not one good fight have we had on this Island for months.

MARTHA

I suppose your brother was deported immediately!

O'ROURKE (*astonished*)

Deported, ma'am. I should say not. Michael O'Callahan, the Commissioner of Immigration, comes up to my brother, an' "Patrick O'Rourke," says he, "wid your vicious fighting abilities, we'll make a first-rate New York pleeceman of you—but you've got to quit your cursin' and swearin'." "Bedad," says Pat, "it's the pleeceman I'll be, but" (beggin' yer pardon, ma'am)—says he to O'Callahan, "I'll be damned if I quit me cursin' and swearin'."

MARTHA

What a dreadful person!

O'ROURKE (*explanatory*)

O'Callahan seen his heart was in the right place, ma'am. Says he to me brother, "Then if you won't quit cursin' and swearin', O'Rourke," says he, "will you promise you'll act like a gentleman, an' only curse an' swear when you're at home?" "Sure," says Pat, an' wid that they let him in.

RUTHERFORD

Indeed!

O'ROURKE

An' today, sir, my brother owns three clubs on the East Side, an' is runnin' for Alderman next election. Maybe you've heard of him sir? Patrick O'Rourke's his name.

THE FAMILY EXIT

RUTHERFORD

I can't say I have, Mr. O'Rourke. I am not well acquainted in East Side club circles. (*He looks at his watch.*) I'd be infinitely obliged if you could arrange for me to see my brother as soon as possible.

O'ROURKE

Sure, sir, I didn't know you was in a hurry. As a general rule, most people that comes here to meet their relatives is in no hurry at all!

CORNELIUS

My uncle's been away for twenty years. I've never seen him.

O'ROURKE

Sure, that accounts for it, sir. I know some-thin' about family life myself. I've had troubles of my own! (*Going to the desk.*) What did you say his name was?

RUTHERFORD (*impatient*)

Peter Vandusen.

O'ROURKE

Vandusen. There you are, sir. Peter Vandusen, Case No. 374. (*Looking up.*) I'm not sure you can see him, sir. When they've got a number like this here, it means they've got somethin' agin' him.

RUTHERFORD

Something against him! Whatever do you mean?

(*Martha and Eugenia rise.*)

O'ROURKE

How did you know your brother was here?

FIVE ONE-ACT COMEDIES

RUTHERFORD

Mr. Tillotson, our lawyer, told us so this morning, and we came here immediately to arrange matters with the authorities.

O'ROURKE

Did yer lawyer tell you why your brother was detained here?

RUTHERFORD

Not a word.

(O'Rourke takes a paper from the desk, and Rutherford crosses to him.)

O'ROURKE

Well, it can only be for one of a few things that the United States Government is detainin' him. (He consults the lists.) There's our regulations. Did you know whether yer brother has small-pox or trachoma, for instance?

EUGENIA

Uncle can't have anything like that the matter with him, can he, Mother?

CORNELIUS (*facetiously*)

I should expect Uncle Peter to have better taste than to bring anything like that into the country!

O'ROURKE

How about the bubonic plague, or cholera, or the like obnoxious diseases?

RUTHERFORD (*nettled*)

My brother, sir, comes of a thoroughly respectable old American family!

O'ROURKE

Ah! Then maybe they won't let him in for moral reasons.

THE FAMILY EXIT

MARTHA

What!

RUTHERFORD

So far as we know, my brother is a confirmed bachelor.

O'ROURKE

He may be a bachelor, sir, but is he a polygamist?

RUTHERFORD

A polygamist? What do you want to know that for?

O'ROURKE (*points to the paper*)

It's one of the questions we ask. If he's a polygamist, the United States won't let him land. We've enough of that sort here already!

RUTHERFORD

These questions are absolutely absurd!

O'ROURKE (*consulting the paper*)

Is yer brother an anarchist, sir?

EUGENIA (*enthusiastically*)

Wouldn't that be exciting! Fancy Uncle being an anarchist—and throwing bombs and things!

I do hope he's an anarchist!

MARTHA (*severely*)

Nonsense! Your uncle is too rich to be an anarchist!

O'ROURKE (*crosses to the telephone at the table, left*)

Just a minute! I'll call the superintendent.

(*Takes the phone.*) Official 3. Is that you, Sullivan? There's a party here to see a Mr. Peter Vandusen, No. 374. One of the gentlemen's his brother. (*Appraises Rutherford.*) Yes, he's quite the gentleman—all dolled up

FIVE ONE-ACT COMEDIES

fine. What is 374 being held for? The devil you say! Are you sure? All right. (*He drops the receiver.*)

RUTHERFORD

What is it?

O'ROURKE

It's morals, sir!

MARTHA

Morals? (*She rises.*)

RUTHERFORD

Morals? What do you mean?

O'ROURKE

Case No. 374 arrived wid Case No. 375.

MARTHA

What on earth is that?

O'ROURKE

375 is a woman!

RUTHERFORD

A woman!

MARTHA (*shocked*)

Do you mean he came here from Paris with a lady?

O'ROURKE

No, ma'am, a woman!

MARTHA (*to Rutherford*)

Rutherford, my dear, do you think it right for Eugenia to remain here while we uncover the details of this disgusting affair?

RUTHERFORD

Certainly not, Martha. Eugenia, wait outside!

EUGENIA

Dad, please let me stay. I heard all about when Aunt Vera spent the week-end with the chauf-

THE FAMILY EXIT

feur, and if I was old enough to hear about that,
I'm old enough to hear about this, too.

MARTHA

This is quite a different matter. It isn't at all likely that my sister Vera would stoop to the depravities of which your father's brother is capable.

RUTHERFORD (*hotly*)

Until this day there has never been a breath of scandal linked with the name of Vandusen, but I well remember the weeks we spent worrying over the possibility of your sister's disgraceful escapade becoming public.

MARTHA

At any rate, even if my sister was guilty of improper behavior, she had the decency to be improper in private, as a well-bred person should, instead of flaunting the scandal in the face of the entire United States, as your brother seems to be doing!

RUTHERFORD

Eugenia, on second thought, you may stay. I'm sure there must be some misunderstanding. No Rutherford-Vandusen could ever sink so low as to be capable of anything in the nature of your Aunt Vera's escapade.

CORNELIUS

How about me, Dad?

MARTHA

Don't be impertinent, Cornelius.

RUTHERFORD (*to O'Rourke*)

Can we see my brother?

O'ROURKE

Sure, sir. The United States don't object to you

FIVE ONE-ACT COMEDIES

seein' him. It's a pity he didn't let you know, sir, so's you could have tipped him off to come on one boat—and the female alien on the next. That's the regular way to do it, sir, with every-thing moral and aboveboard.

CORNELIUS

That's a cinch of a way to be moral!

O'ROURKE

Sure, sir. It's easy enough to be moral! Comply wid the law of the United States, that's what we say. When a man knows that so long as he behaves decent when he comes into this coun-try, he can stay here and be as indecent as he pleases, it's a poor sort of morality, says we, for him not to come here on one ship an' her on another, an' comply wid the laws of the United States!

CORNELIUS

Say, what'll happen if 374 sticks to 375?

O'ROURKE

They'll both be sent back to Paris, sir, and that's the right place for them as has no self-control. Would you like to see the female alien along wid your brother, sir?

MARTHA

The female alien? Certainly not.

CORNELIUS

Mother! Be a sport! Let's look her over.

MARTHA

Do you want your mother and your sister to meet such a woman?

EUGENIA

I'd love to meet a really fallen woman, Mother. Besides, she's almost related to us, isn't she?

THE FAMILY EXIT

MARTHA

Eugenia, you're getting all kinds of wrong ideas in your head. I'm determined you shall not stay here.

EUGENIA

Where shall I go?

MARTHA (*points to the door, left, marked "Private"*)

May she wait in there?

O'ROURKE

Sure, if she wants to, ma'am—but I don't advise it.

MARTHA

Why not?

O'ROURKE

That's where we keep the white slaves, ma'am.

MARTHA

White slaves!

O'ROURKE

Don't be scared, ma'am. They're just as scared of you as you are of them.

MARTHA (*hysterically*)

I wish we hadn't come. This place is full of dreadful people!

O'ROURKE

This room what you're in now, ma'am, was once the typhoid ward.

(*They all rise.*)

RUTHERFORD

The typhoid ward!

(*Cornelius crosses to Eugenia.*)

O'ROURKE

Yes, sir, and I've heard tell that they stacked

FIVE ONE-ACT COMEDIES

the corpses one on top of another, during one of them epidemics, that high! (*Pantomimes height to shoulders.*)

MARTHA

I feel quite faint, Rutherford.

O'ROURKE (*laughs*)

Sure, it's all right now, ma'am. The old typhoid ward was burnt down years ago. I'll go an' bring yer brother, sir. (*He goes out, right.*)

MARTHA

What a horrible creature!

RUTHERFORD (*sits at the table, left*)

What do you expect from a government official nowadays? Cornelius, this is what we get for electing a Democratic Administration.

MARTHA

I'm afraid to touch anything. I shan't be able to go near the children for a month. (*She fans the air.*) I can almost feel disease in the air!

RUTHERFORD

Don't fuss, Martha.

MARTHA

I'm not fussing, Rutherford. You annoy me so sometimes, I could almost scream.

RUTHERFORD

Scream, if you want to.

EUGENIA

Father! You know how nervous Mother is!

MARTHA

What does your father care about my nerves? His good-for-nothing brother spends twenty years in Europe,—refuses to have anything to do with his family all that time, and arrives here like a convict; and then nothing suits

THE FAMILY EXIT

your father but that he must endanger our lives by bringing us to this disease-ridden place to meet him.

RUTHERFORD

Did I bring you here? Was it *my* idea?

MARTHA

Do you think I would have suggested coming here if you had told me the kind of place this was?

RUTHERFORD

How should I have known?

MARTHA

If you didn't waste all your time playing golf and sitting around at the club, you'd have made it your business to know, before bringing us here.

RUTHERFORD

Didn't you pester me to come?

MARTHA

I?

RUTHERFORD

Didn't you say that so long as Peter was so wealthy and had no heir, it was my duty to see we should all welcome him?

MARTHA

And what if I did? The children have nothing—absolutely nothing—thanks to your gullibility!

EUGENIA

Oh, Mother, do stop!

MARTHA

I shall not stop. Your father had just as much money as your Uncle Peter in the beginning—and would have had to this day—if he hadn't speculated with it—and with my money into

FIVE ONE-ACT COMEDIES

the bargain. I suppose we can thank our lucky stars there was some he couldn't touch, or we'd be beggars today. As it is, we have to pinch and scrape to get along on our niggardly thirty thousand a year!

RUTHERFORD

Are you never going to stop talking about that money?

MARTHA

Rutherford, so long as there is a breath left in my body, I shall say again what I have said before—you had no business to speculate if you weren't sure of not losing the money!

CORNELIUS

I wish you two wouldn't bother about what we're going to inherit. We're not worrying about it.

EUGENIA

I should think not!

MARTHA

Who's going to pay your debts if anything should happen to your father?

CORNELIUS (*with confidence*)

Why, my wife's father, of course.

MARTHA

That's all very well for you, Cornelius. You're a man.

CORNELIUS

Then why are you arguing?

MARTHA

What about your sister? Who's willing to marry a girl without a penny?

CORNELIUS

Sister'll have no difficulty. She's got enough

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sense to compromise herself with a millionaire, like any other poor society girl.

MARTHA

Eugenia will do no such thing.

EUGENIA

Mother!

MARTHA

There's been enough talk about the family already. I suppose we shall have to treat Uncle Peter cordially, in spite of everything.

RUTHERFORD

Yes, we'd better act discreetly. It is no use antagonizing Peter; he's very eccentric. He may object strongly to any criticism.

MARTHA

Very well, I shall do so—but it will be for your sake, Eugenia.

EUGENIA

Don't bother about me, Mother.

MARTHA (*to Eugenia*)

Your uncle can be of great assistance to you. Before he went to Paris he moved in the very smartest circles—if you can win his affections—in the way you seem to win the affections of all the *poor* young men in town—you should have no difficulty in making an excellent match this season.

O'ROURKE (*off stage, right*)

This way, sir.

(Enter, right, Peter Rutherford-Vandusen. Peter is an aristocratic-looking old man, with a keen sense of sarcastic humor, and a distaste of conventional forms. The family stares at him.)

FIVE ONE-ACT COMEDIES

RUTHERFORD (*crosses to Peter*)

Why—Peter!

PETER (*to Rutherford*)

What the dickens did you want to come here
for?

RUTHERFORD

Why—

PETER

Who told you I was here?

RUTHERFORD

Tillotson.

PETER

Tillotson is a gabbling fool. I shall get another
lawyer immediately. Why did you come,
anyway?

RUTHERFORD

We came to welcome you, Peter. You don't
seem very glad to see us. How are you?

PETER

Oh, I'm quite well. I'm glad to see you. I
suppose this is the family, eh? Hello, Martha.
Why, I hardly recognize you; you've grown so
stout. Is this Cornelius? Why didn't you come
to see me when you were in Paris?

CORNELIUS

I called several times, Uncle, but you were al-
ways out.

PETER

That's right. I remember seeing you through
the window. I vowed I wouldn't see any of the
family for twenty years, and I kept my word.

MARTHA

You always were eccentric, Peter.

THE FAMILY EXIT

PETER

Not really, Martha. When a man does a rational thing, the world calls him eccentric. I had nothing in common with any member of my family, so I stayed away from them for twenty years. There's nothing eccentric about that!

MARTHA

I hope you've gotten over those queer ideas, Peter. But you haven't met your niece, Eugenia.

PETER

Oh, Eugenia! (*He goes to shake hands with her. She kisses him.*) Eugenia, you're just as impulsive as your mother was—thirty years ago.

EUGENIA

Am I, Uncle?

MARTHA (*piqued*)

I hope your uncle's terrible memory isn't as good as it was.

PETER

It gets better every day. Well, Rutherford, I suppose you know I'm in a fine mess here.

RUTHERFORD (*looking meaningfully toward Eugenia*)

Do you think we'd better discuss it now?

PETER

Why not? Perhaps Eugenia could suggest something. Modern young people are probably much more resourceful in affairs of this sort than we old stagers.

MARTHA

Our daughter has been educated in one of our most exclusive schools. You may speak freely before her, Peter.

FIVE ONE-ACT COMEDIES

EUGENIA (*sweetly*)

Anything Uncle Peter does must surely be quite proper.

PETER

You're mistaken, my child. I'm not nearly as old as I look.

EUGENIA

I know. You're forty-five!

PETER

No, little flatterer, fifty-five. That's why I'm here again, to die in peace on good American soil.

EUGENIA

Don't talk that way, Uncle. Why, we are going to have the loveliest time with you. I have it all arranged. We are going to our place at Newport next month, and you'll come with us, won't you? We have perfectly wonderful golf, tennis, swimming, riding, and polo, and this year there's going to be hydro-aeroplaning, too. And there'll be lots of parties, and dances, and dinners, and bazaars, and things like that! You'll enjoy it so much.

PETER

Hm! I don't know. It sounds rather strenuous. I don't think my nerves could stand it—especially the hydro-aeroplaning!

MARTHA

You'll certainly live with us while you're here, Peter. We shall all feel quite hurt if you don't. We're looking forward to it, and I'm sure you'll enjoy it. Cousin Alice and Cousin Susan are going to spend the summer with us, too.

THE FAMILY EXIT

PETER (*alarmed*)

Cousin Alice and Cousin Susan—

RUTHERFORD (*grimly*)

Yes.

PETER

Are those two old cats still in existence? I thought they were dead and buried long ago!

MARTHA

Peter, Peter! The same old Peter!

PETER

Martha! Martha! The same old family!

MARTHA

We all feel so glad having you back with us, Peter. Cousin Augustus and Honoria live in the next cottage to us. They have six children—all splendid young people—and there are Wilhelmina's twins, and the three grandchildren, the cutest things! They're all dying to meet you!

RUTHERFORD (*as though it were all settled*)

Of course, you'll stay with us, Peter. We're planning a little family party for you. After twenty years of absence, we must celebrate your return to us. The family welcomes you, Peter, in spite of your strange behavior to us all. But once a Vandusen, always a Vandusen!

PETER

Yes—it seems like fate.

MARTHA

Then we can count on you for the summer?

PETER

I don't know. (*Dubiously.*) What about Elise?

ALL (*together*)

Elise?

FIVE ONE-ACT COMEDIES

EUGENIA

Who is Elise?

MARTHA (*to Eugenia*)

Never mind, dear.

PETER

Of course, I can't leave Elise.

RUTHERFORD

But, Peter, you don't expect—

PETER

But I've brought her over from Paris. Decidedly no. I can't leave my Elise.

MARTHA

But she can't stay in America. They won't allow her in. That person told us so just now.

PETER (*crosses to Martha*)

Well, I'll let you into a secret. Tillotson's been down to Washington for me. He has a little influence, as you know, and he's arranged everything. She's going to be allowed to land—in fact, both of us will be allowed to land together.

RUTHERFORD

It seems to me it was very foolish of you, Peter, to have attempted to bring the lady with you.

PETER

That's an original observation of yours, Rutherford.

CORNELIUS

Why didn't you keep it quiet, Uncle?

PETER

Naturally, I tried to keep it quiet. But you don't know my Elise. She's so absent-minded. We had separate staterooms on board, but the poor thing kept walking into my cabin all the

THE FAMILY EXIT

time we were crossing. She was sea-sick, poor child, and whenever she feels ill, she can't help acting naturally. But the upshot of it was, everyone was scandalized!

MARTHA (*dryly*)

I should think they might be.

PETER

Some stupid old busybody reported it to the authorities, so they made inquiries and stopped us here.

EUGENIA

Why didn't you marry her, Uncle?

MARTHA

Marry her! Eugenia! The idea!

PETER

Well, I'd often thought of marrying Elise—but then—I didn't. Elise's father was a cab-driver—her mother drank abominably—and one of her brothers was a convict. And you know what the French are. Once you marry into a French family, death alone can separate you from your relatives!

MARTHA

You were quite right, Peter. You couldn't possibly have put up with such awful people. But I'm sure there is some way we can arrange it,—so you could stay with us yourself. You're a man of the world, Peter. You don't have to carry your establishment on your back, like a snail.

PETER

I've thought it all out already, Martha. Tillotson tells me that even if Elise were allowed to land here, I couldn't go with her from New

FIVE ONE-ACT COMEDIES

York City to Jersey without breaking another peculiar law.

RUTHERFORD

Yes—that is so—the Mann Act.

PETER

I'm certainly annoyed with Mr. Mann, whoever he may be. You see, we planned to tour the States together later on, but if we did, I should break this law at least fifty times and probably pass the rest of my old age in jail.

CORNELIUS

Don't worry about that, Uncle! I'll put you on to some dodges to get around that.

PETER

I'm too old for dodges, my boy. If Mr. Mann wants to prevent people traveling, let him do it. Tillotson and I have fixed everything. I've been a confirmed bachelor all my life, but I've given up my freedom to enter the Land of Liberty.

RUTHERFORD

Given up your freedom to enter the Land of Liberty?

PETER

Yes. This morning Elise and I were married!

RUTHERFORD

Married!

PETER

Yes; it solves all our problems. The cab-driver papa-in-law, the alcoholic mamma-in-law, the convict brother-in-law are three thousand miles away—so Elise and I are married.

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MARTHA (*indignantly*)

Married! Do you mean you've married a kept woman?

PETER

I had to keep her, Martha. When you see her, you'll see she's quite unable to support herself.

EUGENIA

Is that woman my aunt, Uncle?

PETER

Yes; and you'll find her a very charming aunt, too. If you like her, we'll *both* come and stay with you.

MARTHA (*crossing to Eugenia*)

Do you mean to suggest bringing a person of that sort into our home?

PETER

Why not? The United States Government has guaranteed her 100 per cent pure. What more do you want?

RUTHERFORD

Peter! Your marrying her is nothing less than an affront to the family.

PETER

Rutherford, I'm surprised at you. You should be delighted to know that, like a Vandusen, I've acted honorably.

MARTHA

It may be honorable to her—but it's dishonorable to us!

RUTHERFORD

It's perfectly stupid to talk of acting honorably, Peter. If it were necessary for a man to marry a woman of that sort to be honorable, where would any of our own girls find husbands?

FIVE ONE-ACT COMEDIES

PETER

Well, it's too late to discuss the ethics of the situation. We're married, and that settles it. Would you like to meet your sister-in-law, Martha?

MARTHA

I shall certainly *not* meet her! Neither shall Eugenia!

PETER (*points to the door, left*)

Elise has been waiting in there to see you for nearly half an hour. Do you want to meet her?
(*He goes to the door, left.*)

EUGENIA (*excited*)

Mother! She's in the room with the white slaves!

MARTHA (*making for the door*)

Rutherford, I insist that we go, at once!

RUTHERFORD

Yes, we'll all go. Come, Eugenia!

(*They leave indignantly. Cornelius lingers.*)

PETER (*to Cornelius*)

Do you want to meet your aunt, Cornelius?

CORNELIUS (*enthusiastically*)

You bet I do, Uncle. I guess she's some kid, eh?

PETER (*with a queer smile*)

Well, she is—in a way.

CORNELIUS (*knowingly*)

You've got to hand it to the French chickens when it comes to class, Uncle. I've been there myself—so I know.

(*Peter opens the door, left. Enter Elise, a charming little white-haired old lady, dressed in a black*

THE FAMILY EXIT

satin dress, with a white lace collar. She is dignified, yet sweet in her manner. Cornelius lets out a whistle of surprise. Peter introduces Cornelius.)

PETER

Your nephew, Cornelius.

ELISE

Bon jour, m'sieu! I speak not good englise.

CORNELIUS (*with a dreadful accent*)

Bon jour, tante. Comment vous allez vous?

ELISE (*smiling graciously*)

Vouz parlez français?

CORNELIUS (*confused*)

Oui, madame— Well, Uncle, I guess I'll beat it! (*He does so, double quick time.*)

ELISE

Why does he go so quick? Do I frighten him?

PETER

He must have been disappointed, little wife. He was hoping to find something in the nature of what he termed "a chicken".

ELISE (*puzzled*)

A chick-en? Ah—poulet! What you mean, Peter?

PETER

He didn't know we've lived together these past twenty years.

ELISE

But the family—the dreadful family, that you hate so much?

PETER

Gone, dear, gone!

FIVE ONE-ACT COMEDIES

ELISE

Gone? C'est merveilleux! How do you get rid of these 'orrible people so easy?

PETER

By marrying you, dear. In France, I got rid of *your* family by *not* marrying you. In America, I get rid of *my* family *by* marrying you.

CURTAIN

PIE

A COMEDY IN ONE ACT

PIE was first produced by the Provincetown Players
at the Playwrights' Theatre, New York, in January
1920, with the following cast:

CLIFFORD QUILTER	JAMES LIGHT
DIANTHA, <i>his wife</i>	EDIE HINEMANN
PATROLMAN DAN O'DONAHUE	HOWARD McLENNAN
ANNIE MULLIGAN	Alice ROSTETTER

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PIE

SCENE

A comfortable room in Annie Mulligan's apartment. In the center is a small table covered with a white table-cloth and laid for two people. Notwithstanding the commonplace furniture, the room is cosy, and not unattractive. The presence of an armchair and desk, newspapers on the floor, books scattered everywhere, and a general air of being lived in, indicates that the room is not used exclusively as a dining-room. There is a door, center, leading to the hall. Viewed from the audience, there is a window in the right wall, and a door in the left wall leading to the kitchen; a bright, green flower-pot stands in front of the window.

Clifford Quilter and Annie Mulligan are finishing dinner. Clifford alternately gnaws the end of a chicken bone, and takes a puff at his pipe. Annie, after drinking some coffee from her saucer, divides an apple pie into large portions with mathematical precision.

Clifford is a tall, mild-looking person, rather boyish in his enthusiasm over the chicken. He wears a brightly-colored dressing-gown and carpet slippers; he looks dreamily up at the ceiling through a pair of heavy horn-rimmed glasses. His utter lack of table manners shows that he is very much at home.

FIVE ONE-ACT COMEDIES

Annie is a large, blonde Irishwoman; the generous curves of her body indicate an easy-going disposition and an indulgence in good food. Her smile is contagious. There is something very appetizing in the sight of Annie, as she cuts a generous portion of apple pie, and balancing it neatly on the end of a bread-knife, offers it to Clifford.

ANNIE (*beaming on Clifford*)
Have a piece of pie, dearie!

CLIFFORD

I'm not through with the chicken yet, Annie.
(*He looks over the débris of the chicken on the plate.*) What's become of the other leg?

ANNIE (*angrily*)
Sure, d'ye expect a chicken to have three legs?
Two you've eaten, and now you're lookin'
for the third!

CLIFFORD

How absent-minded of me. I was thinking of
the plot of a new story. Let me tell it to you!

ANNIE (*incensed*)
What a man! Always having plots at dinner-
time!

CLIFFORD

But, Annie—

ANNIE
Why don't ye work while ye work (*swallows a mouthful*), an' eat while ye eat?

CLIFFORD (*apologetically*)
Why—I was eating, Annie.

ANNIE (*still angry*)
I know you was, Clifford, but you was payin'
no attention to what you was eatin'. Half

PIE

the day I'm in the kitchen, cookin' the tasty meals for you—and *you*—no sooner do you get your teeth into a nice young broiler, before you have a plot,—an' by the time you're through wid it, the chicken's nearly all gone, an' you no more tastin' it than if it was cornmeal mush. It's heart-breakin' work, it is, Clifford, cookin' for a man like you!

CLIFFORD (*rises and pats her consolingly*)

Come, Annie, dear. Don't feel hurt. I *do* appreciate your cooking—immensely. Your chicken was a masterpiece; there was an indefinable something about its flavor, Annie, that just carried me away—over the chimney-tops and roofs of the city—away to the balmy countryside—into Elysian Fields of sunshine, into drowsy, fulsome farmyards, with the browsing cattle and clucking hens. Then, Annie, there was woven in my mind, a simple, beautiful story—of love unfulfilled—of sacrifice unrewarded! Annie, I salute you. (*He bows.*) Your cooking is poetry to my soul.

ANNIE (*still angry*)

Your soul! Go along wid you. You don't know the difference between your soul and your stomach.

CLIFFORD

How few of us do? However, that's philosophy, and thank the Lord, you don't understand philosophy. (*He sits.*) Please give me a piece of pie—and *see* whether I appreciate it!

(*Annie helps him to pie.*)

FIVE ONE-ACT COMEDIES

ANNIE (*happily*)

There!

CLIFFORD (*adoringly, after having choked down a large mouthful*)

Wonderful apple pie! Wonderful apple pie! How I have sung of your delicate aroma—the satisfying qualities of your amber-colored substance—the exquisite crispness of your daintiest of crusts! And above all, O pie—excelling—nay—eclipsing all those other virtues—more precious than all the rest—I sing the praise of your delectable digestibility.

ANNIE (*wreathed in smiles*)

Don't talk so much. Eat!

(*Clifford needs no second invitation.*)

CLIFFORD

Do you remember how I immortalized your pie in my last novel, Annie, dear? A review of it has just come out in the Literary Digest.

ANNIE

No!

CLIFFORD

Let me read it to you. (*Clifford takes a clipping out of his pocket and reads.*) "In these days when morbid introspection holds the literary stage, when novelist after novelist takes a gruesome, macabre-like delight in analyzing and dissecting the grossest phases of mankind's abnormalities, how refreshing it is to come upon a book, like 'Happy Firesides,' by Clifford Quilter, and to know that clean, wholesome literature is not yet dead in America. 'Happy Firesides,' a plain, simple story of the

PIE

love of a good man for a good woman, and the spiritual happiness their unselfishness brought them, should be read by every one who believes in upholding the sacred traditions of the home."

(To Annie.) There! What do you think of that? (*Annie begins to weep in a very ungraceful manner.*) What's the matter?

ANNIE (*bursts out*)

I think you ought to leave me and go back to your wife.

CLIFFORD (*startled*)

What! Go back to my wife? What an unpleasant thought!

ANNIE

But, Clifford—

CLIFFORD (*interrupting quickly and holding out his plate*)

Some more pie, dear. I have a good appetite today. *Don't make me lose it.*

ANNIE

Sure, an' it does me heart good to see you eatin' so well, Clifford. But it's back to your wife you should go, dearie.

CLIFFORD (*rises and caresses her*)

Come, Annie, you've never asked me to go back to my wife before. Be reasonable, dear!

ANNIE (*gulps*)

Sure, I'm tryin' to be reasonable. D'ye think I want you to go away and leave me, after the happy days we've had together?

CLIFFORD

Then why do you ask me to go? (*Suspiciously.*) Somebody must have been putting silly no-

FIVE ONE-ACT COMEDIES

tions into your head. Whatever gave you such a stupid idea?

ANNIE

I—I—I've been reading "Happy Firesides."

CLIFFORD (*taken aback*)

You've read "Happy Firesides"! Why, Annie, I thought you never read anything (*sotto voce*) outside of the New York American. (*He sits.*)

ANNIE

I picked it up off the floor last week. I never thought I'd understand it, wid all them big long words you use when you're talkin', but, honest, Clifford, it didn't seem no more harder than Ella Wheeler Wilcox, an' just as interestin', too.

CLIFFORD (*indignantly*)

My dear Annie, please don't compare me with Ella Wheeler Wilcox.

ANNIE (*reassuring*)

Sure, an' I didn't mean her no harm, dearie.

CLIFFORD (*sarcastically*)

Indeed!

ANNIE (*sentimentally*)

What you said about love and the home, an' all them things, honey, was just beautiful, an', what's more, they're true! It just broke my heart thinkin' how you was livin' wid me, instead of wid your wife, an' your thoughts so lovely and pure, an' all. Honest, Clifford, the day I finished readin' it, I had to go out into the kitchen and peel onions, just to have an excuse if the neighbors seen me cryin'!

CLIFFORD (*comforts her, taking her hands across the table*)

PIE

Come, come, my poor old Annie! Why didn't you tell your Clifford all about it before?

ANNIE

I just couldn't, dearie. I thought you'd think me ungrateful after we've been so happy together. You've been so kind, too.

CLIFFORD (*with great sincerity*)

Kind? Why, Annie, it's you that's been kind. You've taken me under your wing, dear; you've been mother and sweetheart to me—all in one. Don't talk of *my* being kind, Annie, you're the kindest person in the world, dear, and I do, do love you!

ANNIE

Sure, you're that nice, makin' love to me, Clifford, I feel like tellin' Dan O'Donahue to go to the devil.

CLIFFORD (*rises, surprised*)

Dan O'Donahue? Who's he?

ANNIE

He's me cousin.

CLIFFORD

Your cousin? How was it you've never mentioned him before?

ANNIE

I was kind-a ashamed to.

CLIFFORD

Ashamed? Why?

ANNIE (*apologetically*)

Well—you see—he's a policeman.

CLIFFORD

Oh!

ANNIE

He says we ain't livin' moral.

FIVE ONE-ACT COMEDIES

CLIFFORD

Of course *he'd* say that! What do you expect a policeman to know about morality?

ANNIE

And it's *right* he is. Sure, *you* say so yourself.

CLIFFORD (*astonished*)

I say so?

ANNIE

Yes, you say it in "Happy Firesides."

CLIFFORD (*his voice failing*)

I do?

ANNIE

Don't you remember how Jack Maitland went back to his wife?

CLIFFORD (*taken aback*)

That's true. He did. But then, dear, I'm no Jack Maitland. Have you a copy of the book here?

ANNIE (*points to the desk*)

Sure, it's there, in the drawer. (*Clifford rises and fumbles at the drawer*) Can't you find it? It's underneath the Bible.

CLIFFORD

Here it is. (*He produces the book, turns pages.*) Now, Annie, listen to this: (*He reads*) "One wishes that some new form of descriptive art could be evolved to describe a man like Jack Maitland. Something more graphic than verbiage is needed to do justice to his portrayal. Jack Maitland was a man of more than rugged physique. Health and strength radiated from his lithe, muscular body. His flashing eyes, his ruby lips, his white teeth glinting in the sunlight, all told the tale of masculine virility, of bound-

PIE

less energy, of courage, skill, and determination." (*He half closes the book.*) There, Annie, I ask you, is that like me?

ANNIE (*dubiously*)

Well, it's somethin' like you.

CLIFFORD

I have white teeth.

ANNIE (*encouragingly*)

Sure, it's too modest you are, Clifford.

CLIFFORD

But listen to this: "Like all who enjoy a rude, vigorous health, his appetite was voracious and his digestion like that of an ostrich." Is that like me? (*He thrusts the book at her.*)

ANNIE

There's nothing wrong wid your appetite.

CLIFFORD (*closes the book*)

Annie, the hero of this book had courage and determination. In addition, he had an excellent digestion. *He was able to return to his wife.*

ANNIE (*emphatically*)

And so must you, dearie.

CLIFFORD

I've none of those things, and I'm going to stay right here.

ANNIE (*dogmatically*)

What's right for Jack Maitland, Clifford, is right for you! You mustn't try to make me believe that wrong is right.

CLIFFORD (*hotly*)

Wrong and right are merely relative.

ANNIE (*positively*)

And it's relatives that causes all the trouble.

FIVE ONE-ACT COMEDIES

Dan says they won't ever forgive me as long as you live here.

CLIFFORD

Suppose they don't. What do you care?

ANNIE

Sure, I've got to consider my relatives. Dan says so!

CLIFFORD

Dan, Dan, Dan! How often do you see Dan?

ANNIE

Why, he comes here to dinner once in a while when you're away.

CLIFFORD (*significantly*)

Ah! While I'm away! He has probably heard you inherited a little money. Does he know about it?

ANNIE (*with rising emotion*)

Sure, but it isn't that. It isn't only what Dan says. (*She points to the book.*) You said it ain't right yourself. I ain't happy no more. If you don't go, I shall have to!

CLIFFORD (*with feeling*)

Come, Annie, my darling, you're not serious, are you? You don't understand what this means to me. You know I can't write at home, with Diantha fussing around the house, grumbling every time a room is untidy, and a terrible cook, who martyrs me at every meal!

ANNIE (*forcefully*)

Right comes before writin'.

CLIFFORD (*pleading*)

You're such a simple, sweet dear, Annie, you don't realize the subtle relation between your exquisite food and my spiritual well-being.

PIE

When I was at home, dear, the matter of food was left by my wife to a succession of incompetent hussies who called themselves cooks, and set out to murder me with their villainous concoctions. Thank goodness, no single one stayed long enough to put me completely underground.

ANNIE (*melting*)

How you do talk!

CLIFFORD (*oratorically*)

What happened to me on the delicatessen diet they fed me? They poisoned me with pickles. They tortured me with ptomaine! I was the victim of every form of gastric disorder. I became morbid. I wrote delicatessen novels. I delved into the vinegars and acids of life. I plunged deep into the brine of human misery. I wallowed in the oil of human slime! And then I came to you, Annie,—acidified, salted, pickled. And you healed me—healed me with the blessed salve of your good home cooking. Annie, you've saved me once. Don't throw me back to home and indigestion.

ANNIE (*distraught*)

Oh, dearie, I just don't know what to do. It's terrible for us to be leadin' a life of shame, and it agreein' wid you so well!

CLIFFORD (*indignantly*)

A life of shame. Who said that?

ANNIE

Them's Dan's own words.

CLIFFORD

What do you care for the opinion of a man like Dan? He has the common, conventional point of view about morality. Artists are above

FIVE ONE-ACT COMEDIES

morality. In living with me, Annie, no matter what the world may say, you show a fine pagan spirit. (*He sits in the armchair.*)

ANNIE

Pagan! Go 'long wid ye—it's a Catholic I am.

CLIFFORD (*takes a clipping from his pocket. Annie stands, center*)

See what they say here, dear—"American literature owes much to Mr. Quilter for showing us the blessings of the simple, domestic virtues, and the quiet delights of family life." I can't write that on delicatessen, Annie dear.

ANNIE (*bursts*)

I can't help it, Clifford, I want to be an *honest woman*.

CLIFFORD

What could be more honest, more honorable, than to help me write novels like "Happy Firesides," which extol the ideal of happy homes? I appeal to your sense of duty, Annie. You're not only making me happy, dear, you're making men happy, and women happy, and children happy, all over the United States, and even in England.

ANNIE (*dubiously*)

Am I?

CLIFFORD

And you must keep it up, dear, you mustn't stop. Why, Annie, rather than have this calamity happen, I'll go to Diantha, get a divorce, and marry you!

ANNIE (*aghast*)

An' have me called a homewrecker by everybody?

PIE

CLIFFORD

No, dear, no!

ANNIE (*a light dawning on her*)

I'm a vampire, that's what I am.

CLIFFORD (*soothingly, rising*)

A vampire! Why, the idea! Nobody will think you a vampire, dear.

ANNIE

Yes they will, dearie, if I give way to myself and drive your wife out, and wreck her home, and ruin her life. I will be a vampire. I'll lose my self-respect.

CLIFFORD (*with bravado*)

I'd like to see that Dan O'Donahue! I'd tell him what I think of him.

ANNIE (*assuringly*)

He's goin' to be here in a minute.

CLIFFORD (*his bravado disappearing*)

Well, I guess I don't want to see him, anyway. He's caused enough mischief.

ANNIE (*persuasively*)

Run along before he comes, Clifford. Why don't you go back home for a few days, honey dear, and we'll both think it over. Do it just to please me. I want to feel right about it, honest I do.

CLIFFORD (*tenderly*)

I know you do, Annie. Very well, I'll go and talk it over with Diantha. Where are my shoes?

(*He slips off his dressing-gown, which he throws on the floor, and kicks off his slippers. They hunt on their hands and knees for his shoes, which are found under the furniture.*)

FIVE ONE-ACT COMEDIES

ANNIE

I sure will miss you, dearie!

CLIFFORD (*sitting in the armchair and putting on his shoes*)

We'll both be sorry, Annie. But we won't quarrel over it, dear. We never have quarreled, and we're not going to begin now, are we?

ANNIE

Of course not. Kiss me goodbye! (*They kiss and move toward the door. She helps him with his coat and hat.*) Here's your umbrella! Let me wrap you up a piece of pie to put in your pocket, dearie.

CLIFFORD

I'll take it for remembrance. But, no! I must try to forget. (*They kiss again.*) Goodbye!

(*Clifford goes out, center. Annie reads from book at table.*)

ANNIE (*sighs*)

What's right is right! (*She carries the coffee-pot to the door leading to the kitchen and goes out.*)

(*Enter Clifford, center; he tiptoes to the pie dish, cuts a piece of pie, and goes to the drawer of the desk, from which he takes some paper; he wraps the pie up in the paper. Meanwhile, the door, center, opens; enter stealthily Dan O'Donahue, a big, red-faced policeman. He tiptoes behind Clifford and as Clifford puts the parcel containing the pie in his pocket, Dan pounces upon him and grabs the parcel.*)

DAN

No you don't!

PIE

CLIFFORD

What's the matter?

DAN

I'll show you what's the matter! What are you stealing?

(Annie comes in from the kitchen.)

ANNIE

Sure, an' what is the matter?

DAN (*excitedly*)

You sure are lucky, Annie. I seen this here guy walkin' up the street, lookin' kinda hesitatin' and I thinks to myself, "There goes a real hard-boiled egg." You can always tell a criminal by the shape of his head, Annie, an' when I seen this little runt, I sizes him up, and begins to follow him. And all of a sudden he stops at your front door, *opens it wid a key*, mind you, closes it quietly, walks upstairs on tiptoe, and I just gets here in time to see him slip this here parcel into his pocket.

CLIFFORD

But I can explain everything.

DAN (*vindictively*)

I know you oily guys. You'll explain to the judge. Come to look at you, I *know* you. You've been in jail before.

ANNIE

Why, I know the gentleman. Dan, let go of him.

DAN

Yer tryin' to shield him, Annie. Don't waste your pity on a crook like him. What's in the parcel?

FIVE ONE-ACT COMEDIES

ANNIE

I tell you he ain't a crook.

DAN (*puzzled*)

Then who is he?

ANNIE (*hesitates*)

Why—why—he's my gentleman friend.

DAN (*taken aback*)

He *is*? But you said he was a *regular* gentleman!

ANNIE

Didn't I tell you he was an author?

DAN

What's he got in this parcel?

(*Annie opens the parcel.*)

ANNIE

Pie!

DAN (*positively aghast*)

Apple pie! Well!

CLIFFORD

Goodbye, Annie. Goodbye, Mr. O'Donahue.

I'm going to ask the Police Commissioner to promote you.

DAN (*surly*)

Indade, an' where to?

CLIFFORD

They need men like you in the Intelligence Department. (*He goes out.*)

DAN

Has he gone for good?

ANNIE (*sadly*)

Yes, I suppose so.

DAN (*approvingly*)

Fine business. Yer doin' right, Annie. Just finished dinner, eh?

PIE

ANNIE

We was just through.

DAN

That's a good-lookin' chicken ye have there!

ANNIE (*not very inviting*)

It's cold, or I'd ask you to have some.

DAN (*not at all abashed*)

Sure, I don't mind it cold.

ANNIE

Help yerself if you're hungry. (*She gives him knife, fork, and plate.*)

DAN

Thank you, Annie. (*He sits at the table in Clifford's chair.*)

ANNIE (*resigned*)

I'll get you a cup of hot coffee.

DAN

That'll be great, Annie.

(*Annie goes off. Dan literally falls upon the food. His appetite completely eclipses that of Clifford. He rapidly devours the remains of the chicken, as well as the apple pie, and then he unwraps the piece of pie wrapped up in paper and consumes that as well. Enter Annie, left, with coffee.*)

ANNIE

Here you are. (*She hands him a cup of coffee.*)

DAN

That smells like good coffee. (*He drinks.*) I had a talk wid the family about you, Annie, and it's goin' to be all right. We're all willin' to forget the past. Now, what I've bin thinkin' is this. We've got to get the folks together, an'

FIVE ONE-ACT COMEDIES

my idea is you should have them all here to dinner next Sunday.

ANNIE

Dan, will they *really* forgive me?

DAN

Lave it to me. You can always rely on me, Annie, to handle the folks. (*Surveying the empty dishes.*) Gosh, don't the walkin' around in the fresh air make a man hungry?

ANNIE

Will you have a bit of cheese?

DAN

Why, I guess I could make room for a bite or so. (*Annie gets the cheese from the cupboard.*) Annie, I got some good news for yer. I told the Captain of my precinct I had a cousin, an unprotected female, livin' in this block, and he's bin and transferred me to this beat, so I'll be able to look in here every hour or so for a bit o'er-conversation wid yer.

ANNIE (*alarmed by the prospect*)

Well, now, if you're on duty, you can't be comin' in here all the time now, can you?

DAN (*knowingly*)

Lave it to me, Annie. Lave it to me! (*The bell rings.*)

ANNIE

Who can that be?

DAN

Was you expectin' somebody?

ANNIE (*puzzled*)

Not a soul. I've got my old dress on. Will ye go to the door?

PIE

DAN

All right.

(*Dan goes out, center. Annie stands near, peering through a gap in the door. Dan comes back.*)

DAN

It's a lady to see yer, an' she won't give her name.

ANNIE

It ain't the lady from the laundry?

DAN

It's a real swell dame!

ANNIE (*flustered*)

Ask her in, Dan, while I go and change my dress. You talk to her.

DAN

What shall I talk about?

ANNIE

Oh, anything. Tell her about some of them swell murder cases you was in. (*Annie goes off, left.*)

(*Dan opens the door, center, and calls.*)

DAN (*officially*)

Step this way, please.

(*Enter Diantha Quilter. She is a good-looking, artistically dressed woman, slightly freakish in appearance. She wears a one-piece gown. She paces the room restlessly as she talks.*)

DIANTHA

I hope I'm not intruding?

DAN

Sit down and make yourself comfortable,

FIVE ONE-ACT COMEDIES

ma'am. Annie was just giving me a little lunch.
Maybe you'd like a drink of coffee?

DIANTHA (*shudders*)

Thank you. I *never* take coffee!

DAN

Would yer like a bit of bread and cheese?

DIANTHA (*shuddering still more*)

Thank you. I've just finished dinner, and I'm afraid it hasn't quite agreed with me. Besides, I *never* take cheese.

DAN (*attempting jocularity*)

You should be a policeman, ma'am, ye'd take anything.

DIANTHA

That seems to be so. I understand you took my husband's pie.

DAN (*taken aback*)

Your husband! Was that your husband?

DIANTHA

It was. Don't look so startled. I still know my husband when I see him.

DAN

I sure am sorry for yer, ma'am. It's me that's makin' him go back to ye.

DIANTHA

Ah! So you're the cause of all this trouble.

DAN

Trouble?

DIANTHA

To think of my husband being sent back to me by a policeman. It's humiliating.

DAN

Isn't it glad ye are to have him back wid ye?

PIE

DIANTHA

Glad? How absurd. Don't you know I don't get along with my husband?

DAN

I nivver knew a thing about it. He looks to me like a mighty fine feller, ma'am.

DIANTHA

I'm glad *you* like him. Perhaps you'll help me. Have you any influence over the lady who lives here, Mr.—?

DAN

O'Donahue's me name. Sure, ma'am, that I have. I'm her cousin. Won't you set down, ma'am?

DIANTHA (*sits at the table. Dan sits at the other side*)

Very well. Let me tell you why I want you to help me. In addition to being Mr. Quilter's wife, Mr. O'Donahue, I'm an interior decorator. In fact, *I originated the Home Beautiful.*

DAN

Beggin' yer pardon, ma'am, but what the devil is that?

DIANTHA

Haven't you heard of the Home Beautiful?

DAN

No; nor seen one, neither.

DIANTHA (*reciting her favorite formula*)

Why, the Home Beautiful is a home, beautifully decorated, harmonized to the personality of its occupants. I believe, Mr. O'Donahue, that a refined, tastefully decorated home shows at once that the people living in it possess distinction and culture. Don't you agree with me?

FIVE ONE-ACT COMEDIES

DAN

Sure, ma'am. But I bet them things cost like the dickens.

DIANTHA (*rises*)

Cost has nothing to do with it, Mr. O'Donahue. This is the kind of a room my husband likes. Look at the hideous green flower-pot. Look at his slippers there, his pipe on the table, his dressing-gown on the floor, and cigarette ashes strewn everywhere. What kind of a Home Beautiful could *I* have if my husband lived in it? I appeal to you, Mr. O'Donahue. (*She sits.*)

DAN

Sure, a man's got to have his little comforts, ma'am.

DIANTHA

His comforts are my discomforts. But he and I have been getting along splendidly since he's been living here. The arrangement is perfect. I'm known as Mrs. Quilter, the wife of the celebrated novelist, and it helps me in a professional way. In return, whenever Clifford writes a novel, I decorate the different rooms he describes, so that his readers haven't the faintest idea he has such abominably bad taste.

DAN

But wouldn't it be better, ma'am, if you and him was livin' together, like a nice, respectable married couple?

DIANTHA

Clifford is right. You *are* interfering. (*Severely.*) You'd better think twice before you come between husband and wife, Mr. O'Donahue.

PIE

DAN (*rises*)

He ain't going to live *here*, that's all!

DIANTHA (*rises*)

You're simply jealous. You're just interfering because you like the food here.

DAN

Who told you that?

DIANTHA

Clifford. And I believe him. He says you always call at meal times.

DAN

It's a lie, ma'am. It's an insult to me uniform.

(Enter *Annie*, dressed in a tight-fitting white gown; her face is very red.)

DIANTHA (*astonished*)

Why! Annie Mulligan!

ANNIE

Lor'! The missus!

DIANTHA (*repeating with astonished deliberation*)

Annie Mulligan!

ANNIE

Yes, ma'am.

DIANTHA

I thought you went with a family in Philadelphia.

ANNIE (*dramatically*)

Didn't he tell you—I was—*she*?

DIANTHA (*a light dawning on her*)

Not a word. The wretch!

ANNIE

Maybe he was afraid, ma'am.

DIANTHA

I'll *never* forgive him, never!

FIVE ONE-ACT COMEDIES

ANNIE

Oh, ma'am!

DIANTHA

You were the best cook I ever had. I wouldn't have lost you for anything.

ANNIE (*taking Clifford's part*)

Sure, it wasn't his fault, ma'am, indeed it wasn't. I never would have left you, if you hadn't insisted on me doin' the washin' and ironin', as well as the cookin' and general house-work.

DIANTHA (*sharply*)

You made an absurd fuss about the washing and ironing. There was hardly a half-day's work a week.

ANNIE (*her temper rising*)

I know I'm a bad woman, Mrs. Quilter, but I will not do washin' and ironin' under sixty-five a month, not for nobody.

DIANTHA

This is all too trifling to quarrel about. Tell me, Annie, how did this affair start with my husband?

ANNIE

Why, ma'am, he was that uncomfortable at home, upsettin' the beautiful furniture in all them fine rooms, so when you was away lec-turin' on the Home Beautiful, he used to stay out in the kitchen so as not to disturb anything, and there he'd be, handin' me the saucepans, and helpin' me to wash up. It was that romantic, ma'am, was it any wonder I fell in love with him?

PIE

DIANTHA

And then?

ANNIE

After I left, ma'am, I come into a little money,
an' started housekeepin' on me own account,
an' he begged me to take him in as a lodger,
an' you know how he talks, ma'am, just like
a book, an' I—I—I—(*Annie sobs.*)

DIANTHA

Well, how do you feel about it?

ANNIE (*proudly*)

I've been a regular vampire, ma'am. But
I've done right in the end. I've sent him back
to you, ma'am, and he is in better condition
now than he ever was.

DAN

You've done right, Annie.

DIANTHA

But I don't want him back.

ANNIE

Don't want him?

DIANTHA (*shuddering*)

Before I say another word, you *must* remove
that terrible green flower-pot. It's been making
me nervous ever since I came into the room.
(To Dan.) Move it over here. (Dan does so
with obvious surprise.) No. Over there. (Dan
goes back.) It isn't right yet. Never mind. I'll
cover it. (She covers it with her scarf. She speaks
to Dan in a businesslike way.) Now, give me
a hand with this. (She begins moving the table,
Dan and Annie assisting her.) Move it more this
way. No; more that way. Stop, stop! There,
that makes the place a little more attractive.

FIVE ONE-ACT COMEDIES

(She then rearranges chairs in other parts of the room.) That's better. I simply can't sit comfortably in a room that doesn't harmonize. (To Annie.) Now, Annie, I want to talk this over with you alone. (She looks meaningfully at Dan.)

ANNIE

You'd better be going about your business, Dan. (Dan does not stir.) For all you know there might be a murder on this block this very minute.

DAN (*moving towards the door*)

I guess I ain't wanted here, but I warn you, Annie, if you don't defend the honor of the Mulligans, I will.

ANNIE

Honor o' the Mulligans! Sure, you'll have enough to do to look after your own honor. Go 'long wid ye and catch the murderer. (She pushes Dan to the door, center.)

DAN

There ain't no murderer. What are you talkin' about! (*He goes out.*)

DIANTHA

Annie, I can't understand your deserting my husband for that stupid creature!

ANNIE

I'm not desertin' him, ma'am. I'm givin' him back to you.

DIANTHA

Let's sit down and talk this over. (*Annie sits.*) Before we start, Annie, do you happen to have any bicarbonate of soda?

PIE

ANNIE

Not a bit, ma'am.

DIANTHA

Just my luck. Never mind. Cigarette? (*She offers a cigarette to Annie, who refuses. Diantha lights her own cigarette, throws the match on the floor, picks it up, looks for an ash tray, and hands the match to Annie. Annie throws it back on the floor.*) We both love Clifford, don't we? Let's forget about ourselves and do what is best for him. You know very well you don't want to send Clifford home. You're only doing it because some one influenced you to do it. Don't you know, Annie, if you do something against your own better judgment, then it isn't right, and when it isn't right, it's wrong, and when it's wrong, it's immoral?

ANNIE

Is it?

DIANTHA

' Of course. And if you send Clifford away, against your own sense of what's right, you'll be an immoral woman! Yes, Annie, an immoral woman!

ANNIE

Sure, I'm immoral if he stays, an' immoral if he goes. What'll I do?

DIANTHA

Just let things be as they were, Annie. Be unselfish! Don't gratify your desire to be conventional.

ANNIE (*suspiciously*)

But why don't you want him, ma'am?

FIVE ONE-ACT COMEDIES

DIANTHA

Because he really loves you, Annie, and you love him. Your love has made him happy. I was never able to do that.

ANNIE

An' why not, ma'am?

DIANTHA (*abstractedly*)

Well, you see, he married me on an intellectual basis, Annie. He said he liked my mind. But when two people marry that way, Annie, it never lasts, because as soon as a woman disagrees with a man, he begins to dislike her mind. Now it's entirely different with you, Annie. No matter whether or not Clifford likes your mind, he'll always like your cooking. *Your love will last.*

ANNIE (*brightening*)

Will it, ma'am?

DIANTHA

It will, indeed. I'm fond of him, Annie, but I'm a modern woman. I'll make the sacrifice. I'll give him back to you, if you'll take him. Do it for his happiness, as well as for mine.

ANNIE

Your happiness?

DIANTHA

Clifford's been so good-natured to me since his digestion is cured. He used to be a perfect bear, so I'm grateful, too.

ANNIE (*graciously*)

Oh, don't mention it, Mrs. Quilter.

DIANTHA

Don't call me Mrs. Quilter. Call me Diantha,

PIE

ANNIE. We have so much in common, haven't we?

ANNIE (*dubiously*)

Yes.

DIANTHA

Come, Annie, dear, you won't sacrifice the happiness of all of us, will you?

ANNIE (*sobs*)

I'm just a weak, weak woman!

DIANTHA

You'll take him back?

ANNIE (*tearfully*)

I will.

DIANTHA

I left him on the street. I'll call him.

(*Diantha goes out. The window, right, opens from without and Clifford tumbles in. Annie, who is washing the tears from her face with drinking water from a glass pitcher on the table, is startled.*)

ANNIE

Lor', what a fright you gave me!

CLIFFORD (*excited*)

Your cousin, Dan O'Donahue, has been standing at the street door with his night-stick in his hand, glaring at me as though he'd like to kill me.

ANNIE

He wouldn't let you in?

CLIFFORD

No. But I fooled him. When he was looking the other way, I climbed up the rain spout. Annie, dear, will you take me back?

FIVE ONE-ACT COMEDIES

ANNIE (*answering everything*)

Indeed I will! My darlin'! (*They embrace.*
Dan's head appears at the window.)

CLIFFORD

I'll never, never leave you, Annie. Never,
never, never!

DAN (*entering through the window and pulling them
apart*)

Oh! Won't you! Consider yourself under
arrest.

CLIFFORD

Consider yourself on the street minding your
own business.

DAN

The impudence!

CLIFFORD (*angrily*)

You came in through the window. You'll find
it more convenient to leave through the door.
(*He pushes Dan towards the door.*)

DAN (*eagerly*)

Is it a fight yer wantin'?

ANNIE (*separating them*)

Ah! Don't be gettin' mad, Dan. He's comin'
back to me with his wife's consent, so there's
nothin' wrong about it any more.

DAN (*suspiciously*)

Isn't there? Why not?

ANNIE

Ye wouldn't understand if I explained it to
you, Dan. I'm not sure I quite understand it
myself.

CLIFFORD

It's all right, Mr. O'Donahue, I assure you.

PIE

ANNIE (*winningly, taking Dan's night-stick away from him*)

See here, Dan, I've got another apple pie in the kitchen. Will ye both come in and have some? (*She places her arms on each of them.*) What d'ye say, Clifford?

CLIFFORD (*with glee*)

Will I? (*To Dan.*) There's one thing we both agree on, Mr. O'Donahue, and that's Annie's apple pie, eh?

DAN (*grinning*)

I guess so.

ANNIE

An' there'll always be enough for the both of you.

DAN

Let's shake hands, Mr. Quilter. And now for the pie!

(*They shake hands and go into the kitchen. Enter Diantha, door, center.*)

DIANTHA (*excited*)

Clifford has completely disappeared, and so has your cousin. Perhaps they're fighting!

ANNIE (*beaming*)

Sure, they're not fighting. They're eatin'—in the kitchen.

DIANTHA

Are they? What are they eating?

ANNIE

Pie! Apple pie!

DIANTHA (*regretfully*)

Oh! Some of your delicious apple pie!

FIVE ONE-ACT COMEDIES

ANNIE

It won't hurt you, dearie, it'll melt in your mouth like butter!

DIANTHA

I'll come in a moment. Do you mind if I use your phone?

ANNIE (*points to the phone*)

Sure, there it is.

(*Annie, highly delighted, goes into the kitchen.*)

DIANTHA (*into the phone*)

Farragut 6500. I want to speak to Mr. Aubrey Hastings' apartment. (*Pause.*) Is that you, Aubrey? (*Pause.*) Yes, I fixed it. (*Pause.*) There's absolutely nothing to be alarmed about.

CURTAIN

LICENSED
A TRAGI-COMEDY IN ONE ACT

LICENSED was first produced by the Washington Square Players in February, 1915, at the Bandbox Theatre, New York, with the following cast:

MRS. RANSOME	JOSEPHINE A. MEYER
JANE RANSOME, <i>her daughter</i>	IDA RAUH
REV. MR. TANNER, <i>a clergyman</i>	CARL SOANES

Produced under the direction of MR. PHILIP MOELLER
LICENSED was the opening play of the first bill of the Washington Square Players.

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LICENSED

SCENE

The Parlor of the Ransomes' house, in a cheap district of Brooklyn. There is a profusion of pictures, ornaments, and miscellaneous furniture. A gilded radiator stands in front of the fireplace. Table, center, on which are some boxes and silver-plated articles arranged for display. Over the door hangs a horseshoe. White flowers and festoons indicate that the room has been prepared for a wedding. To the left is a sofa, upon which lies the body of a dead man, his face covered with a handkerchief. There is a small packing-case at his side, upon which stand two lighted candles, a medicine bottle, and a tumbler. The blinds are drawn.

Janet, dressed in a white, semi-bridal costume, is on her knees at the side of the couch, quietly weeping. After a few moments the door opens, admitting a pale flood of sunshine. A murmur of conversation in the passage without is heard. Mrs. Ransome enters. She is an intelligent, comfortable-looking, middle-aged woman. She wears an elaborate dress of light gray, of a fashion of some years previous, evidently kept for special occasions. She is somewhat hysterical in manner and punctuates her conversation with sniffs.

MRS. RANSOME

My dear child, now do stop cryin'. Won't

FIVE ONE-ACT COMEDIES

you stop cryin'? Yer Aunt Maud's just come, and wants to know if she can see you.

JANET (*through her sobs*)

I don't want to see her. I don't want to see nobody.

MRS. RANSOME

But your aunt, my dear—

JANET (*interrupting*)

No, Mother, not nobody.

(*Mrs. Ransome goes to the door and holds a whispered conversation with somebody outside. She then returns, closing the door behind her, and sits on the chair close to Janet.*)

MRS. RANSOME

She's goin' to wait for yer father. He's almost crazy with worry. All I can say is—thank God it was to have bin a private wedding. If we'd had a lot of people here, I don't know what I should have done. Now, quit yer cryin', Janet, I'm sure we're doin' all we can for you, dear. (*Janet continues to weep softly.*) Come, dear, try and bear up. Try and stop cryin'. Yer eyes are all red, dear, and the minister'll be here in a minute.

JANET (*quieter*)

I don't want to see him, Mother. Can't you see I don't want to see nobody?

MRS. RANSOME

I know, my dear. We tried to stop him comin', but he says to yer father, he says, "If I can't come to her weddin', it's my duty to try to comfort yer daughter"; and that certainly is a fine thing for him to do, for a man in his

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position, too. An' yer father—he feels it as much as you do, what with the trouble he's bin to, buyin' all that furniture for you an' him, and one thing and another. He says Bob must have had a weak heart, an' it's some consolation he was took before the weddin' an' not after, when you might have had a lot of children to look after. An' he's right, too.

JANET

Oh, Bob! Bob!

MRS. RANSOME

Now, now! My poor girl. It makes my heart bleed to hear you.

JANET

Oh, Bob! I want you so. Won't you wake up, Bob?

MRS. RANSOME (*putting her arms around Janet and bursting into sobs*)

There—you're cryin' yer eyes out. There—there—you've still got yer old mother—there—there, just like when you was a baby—there—

JANET (*in a quiet, serious voice*)

Mother—I want to tell you something.

MRS. RANSOME

Well, tell me, dear, what is it?

JANET

You don't know why me and Bob was goin' to get married.

MRS. RANSOME

Why you and Bob was goin' to get married?

JANET

Didn't you never guess *why* we was goin' to get married—sort of *all of a sudden*?

FIVE ONE-ACT COMEDIES

MRS. RANSOME

All of a sudden? Why, I never thought of it.
(*Alarmed.*) There wasn't nothin' wrong be-
tween you and him, was there? (*Janet weeps afresh.*) Answer me. There wasn't nothin'
wrong between you and him, was there?

JANET

Nothin' *wrong*.

MRS. RANSOME

What do you mean, then?

JANET

We was goin' to get married—because we *had* to.

MRS. RANSOME

You mean—you mean you're goin' to have a
baby?

JANET

Yes.

MRS. RANSOME

Are you sure? D'ye know how to tell?

JANET

Yes.

MRS. RANSOME

Oh, Lor'! Goodness gracious! How could it
have happened?

JANET

I'm glad it happened—*now*.

MRS. RANSOME

D'ye understand what this means? What are
we goin' to do about it?

JANET (*through her tears*)

I can't help it. I'm glad it happened. An' if
I lived all over again, I'd want it to happen
again.

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MRS. RANSOME

You'd *want* it to happen? Don't you see what this means? Don't you see that if this gets out, you'll be disgraced till your dying day?

JANET

I'm glad.

MRS. RANSOME

Don't keep on sayin' you're glad. Glad, indeed! Have you thought of the shame an' disgrace this'll bring on me an' yer father? An' after we've saved an' scraped these long years to bring you up respectable, an' give you a good home. You're glad, are you? You certainly got a lot to be glad about.

JANET

Can't you understand, Mother? We wasn't thinking of you when it happened—now it's all I have.

MRS. RANSOME

Of course you wasn't thinkin' of us. Only of yerselves. But me and your father is the ones that's got to stand for all the talk there'll be about it. Think what the family'll say. Think what the neighbors'll say. I don't know what we done to have such a thing happen to us. (*Mrs. Ransome breaks into a spell of exaggerated weeping, which ceases as the doorbell rings.*) There! That's the minister. God only knows what I'd better say to him. (*Mrs. Ransome hurriedly attempts to tidy the room, knocking over a chair in her haste, pulls up the blinds half-way and returns to her chair. There is a knock at the door. Mrs. Ransome breaks into a prolonged howl.*) Come in.

FIVE ONE-ACT COMEDIES

(Enter Rev. Mr. Tanner. He is a clergyman with a rich, middle-class congregation and a few poorer members, amongst whom he numbers the Ransomes. His general attitude is kind but somewhat patronizing; he displays none of the effusive desire to please which is his correct demeanor towards his richer parishioners. The elder Ransomes regard him as their spiritual leader, and worship him, along with God, at a respectful distance.)

TANNER (*speaks in a hushed voice, glancing towards the kneeling figure of Janet*)

Bear up, Mrs. Ransome. Bear up, I beg of you! (*Mrs. Ransome howls more vigorously.*) This is very distressing, Mrs. Ransome.

MRS. RANSOME (*between her sobs*)

It certainly is kind of you to come, Mr. Tanner, I'm sure. We didn't expect to see you when my husband phoned you.

TANNER

Where is your husband now?

MRS. RANSOME

He's gone to send some telegrams to Bob's family, sir—*his* family. We'd planned to have a quiet wedding, sir, with only me and her father and aunt, and then we was goin' to have the rest of his family in this afternoon.

TANNER

It's a very sad thing, Mrs. Ransome.

MRS. RANSOME

It's fairly dazed us, Mr. Tanner. Comin' on top of all the preparation we've bin makin' for the past two weeks, too. An' her father

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spent a pile o' money on their new furniture an' things.

TANNER (*speaking in an undertone*)

Was he insured?

MRS. RANSOME

No, sir, not a penny. That's why it comes so hard on us just now, havin' the expense of a funeral on top of what we've just spent for the weddin'.

TANNER

Well, Mrs. Ransome, I'll try to help you in any way I can.

MRS. RANSOME

Thank you, Mr. Tanner. It certainly is fine of you to say so. Everybody's bin good to us, sir. She had all them presents given to her.

TANNER

Did he have any relatives here?

MRS. RANSOME

Not a soul, poor fellow. He comes from up-state. That's why my husband's gone to send a telegram askin' his father to come to the funeral.

TANNER

How long will your husband be? (*He glances at his watch.*)

MRS. RANSOME

I don't think he'll be more than half an hour. He'd like to see you, if you could wait that long, I know.

TANNER

Very well. I have an engagement later, but I can let that go if necessary.

FIVE ONE-ACT COMEDIES

(*Tanner and Mrs. Ransome sit down in front of the table.*)

MRS. RANSOME

It certainly is a great comfort havin' you here, Mr. Tanner. I feel so upset I don't know what to say.

TANNER

Bear up, Mrs. Ransome. You are not the greatest sufferer. Let me say a few words to your daughter. (*He rises, goes to Janet, and places his hand on her shoulder, but she takes no notice of him.*) My poor child, you must try to bear up, too.

MRS. RANSOME

She takes it so bad, Mr. Tanner, that the Lord should have took him on their weddin' mornin'.

TANNER (*returning to his chair*)

We must not question, Mrs. Ransome, we must not question. The Almighty has thought fit to gather him back into the fold, and we must submit to his will. In such moments as these we feel helpless. We feel the need of a Higher Being, to cling to—to find consolation. Time is the great healer.

MRS. RANSOME

But to expect a weddin' (*sobs*) and find it's a funeral—it's awful! (*Sobs.*) And besides,—Mr. Tanner, you've always bin good to us. We're in other trouble, too. Worse—worse even than this.

TANNER

In other trouble?

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MRS. RANSOME

I just can't bear to think about it.

TANNER

Your husband's business?

MRS. RANSOME

No, sir. It's—I don't know how to say it.
It's her and him.

TANNER

Her and him?

MRS. RANSOME

I'm almost ashamed to tell you. She's goin' to
have a baby.

TANNER (*astounded*)

She's going to be a mother?

MRS. RANSOME

Yes. (*Sobs.*) Oh, you don't know how hard
this is on us, Mr. Tanner. We've always bin
respectable people, sir, as you well know. We've
bin livin' right here on this block these last ten
years, an' everybody knows us in the neighbor-
hood. Her father don't know about it yet.
What he'll say God only knows.

TANNER

I'm terribly sorry to hear this, Mrs. Ransome.

MRS. RANSOME

I can forgive her, sir, but not him. They say
we shouldn't speak ill of the dead—but I always
was opposed to her marryin' him. I wanted her
to marry a steady young fellow of her own re-
ligion, but I might as well have talked to the
wall, for all the notice she took of me.

TANNER

It's not for us to judge, Mrs. Ransome. How
long were they engaged?

FIVE ONE-ACT COMEDIES

MRS. RANSOME

Well, sir, I suppose on an' off it's bin about three years. He never could hold a job long, an' me and her father said he couldn't marry her—not with our consent—until he was earnin' at least forty dollars a week—an' that was only right, considerin' he'd have to support her.

TANNER

Yes, you were quite right in that. Dear, dear. I'm sorry to see a thing of this sort happen—and right in my own congregation. I've expressed my views from the pulpit from time to time very strongly upon the subject, but nowadays our words fall so often upon deaf ears. Young people discredit the Church and her teachings—it's only in the great crises of life that they realize it is we who are right.

MRS. RANSOME

You got to remember they was going to get married, sir. If you'd bin here only an hour earlier, Mr. Tanner, there wouldn't have bin no disgrace. (*She points to the official-looking paper lying on the table.*) Why, sir—there's the marriage certificate—Mr. Smith brought it down from church this morning—all waiting for you to fill it in. If you'd only come earlier, sir, they'd have bin properly married, and there wouldn't have bin a word said.

TANNER

That's true. They might have avoided the immediate disgrace. But after all, *that* isn't the way to get married. To my way of thinking, it isn't so much a matter of disgrace. That means nothing. It's the principle of the thing.

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MRS. RANSOME (*eagerly*)

Oh, Mr. Tanner, do you mean it? Do you mean that the disgrace of it means nothin'?

TANNER

Well—not exactly nothing—but nothing to the principle of the thing.

MRS. RANSOME

An' would you save her from the disgrace of it, if you could, Mr. Tanner, if it don't mean nothin'?

TANNER

You know I'm your friend, Mrs. Ransome. I'll do anything I can to help you, within reason.

MRS. RANSOME (*eagerly pleading*)

Mr. Tanner, if she has a baby, respectable people won't look at us no more. We'll have to move away from here. It'll break her father's heart, as sure as can be. But if you could fill in the marriage certificate as though they'd bin married, Mr. Tanner, why, nobody's to know that it isn't all respectable and proper. They had their license, and ring, and everything else, sir, as you know.

TANNER (*astounded*)

Fill in the marriage certificate?

MRS. RANSOME

They'd have bin married regular if you'd only come an hour earlier, Mr. Tanner. Couldn't you fill it in that they was married before he died, sir?

TANNER

But that would be forgery.

FIVE ONE-ACT COMEDIES

MRS. RANSOME

It would be a good action, Mr. Tanner—indeed it would. Her father an' me haven't done nothin' to deserve it, but we'll be blamed for it just the same. Look at all the years we've bin goin' to your church, and never asked you a favor before, Mr. Tanner.

TANNER (*with feeling and evident sincerity*)

My good woman, I don't know what to say. I'd like to help you, but how can I? In the first place, don't you see that you're asking me to act against my own principles? I've been preaching sermons for years, and making a public stand, too, against hasty marriages that break up homes and lead to the divorce court—or worse. The church is trying to make marriage a thing sacred and apart, instead of the mockery it is in this country today. I sympathize with you deeply. I know how hard it is for you all. But for all I know, you may be asking me to help you thwart the will of God.

MRS. RANSOME

The will of God?

TANNER

Mind you, I don't say that it is, Mrs. Ransome, but it may very well be the Hand of the Almighty. Your daughter and her young man, as she has confessed herself, have tried to use the marriage ceremony—a holy ceremony, mind you—to cover up what they've done.

MRS. RANSOME

Oh, don't talk like that before her, Mr. Tanner.

TANNER

I don't mean to hurt her feelings, or yours

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either, but don't you see what a predicament you place me in. It wouldn't be *right*.

MRS. RANSOME

But they was goin' to get married, sir. You got to take that into consideration. My girl ain't naturally bad. It isn't as though she'd pick up any feller that happened to come along. Hundreds and thousands do it, sir, indeed they do, and most of them much worse than she and him, poor fellow.

TANNER

Yes, there you are right. I may seem hard to you, Mrs. Ransome, but what am I to do? I must stand by my own honest beliefs.

MRS. RANSOME (*pleading hard*)

You can't know what this means to us, sir—or you'd do it out of pity for us, indeed you would. Her father'll take on somethin' dreadful when he hears about it. He'll turn her out of the house, sir, as sure as can be. You know him, sir. You know he's too good a Christian to let her stay here after she's disgraced us all. And then, what's to become of her? She'll lose her job, and who'll give her another—without a reference—an' a baby to support? That's how they get started on the streets, sir, (*sobs*) an' you know it as well as I do.

TANNER

My poor woman, I wish I could help you. It's very distressing—but we all have to do our duty as we see it. I grieve for you from the bottom of my heart. I'll do anything I can for you within reason.

FIVE ONE-ACT COMEDIES

MRS. RANSOME (*almost hysterical, dragging Janet from the side of the body*)

Janet, Janet! Ask him yourself. Ask him on your bended knees. Ask him to save us! (*Janet attempts to return to the side of the body.*) Janet, do you want to ruin us? Can't you speak to him? Can't you ask him? (*Mrs. Ransome breaks into sobs.*)

TANNER

Let her be, Mrs. Ransome.

MRS. RANSOME

Janet—what's the matter? Why are you so hard-hearted?

JANET (*rises and turns fiercely on Mrs. Ransome*)

Who's hard-hearted?

MRS. RANSOME

I didn't mean to hurt you, dearie.

TANNER

I can't tell you how sorry I am for you, Janet.

JANET

Well, I tell you straight, I don't want none of your pity.

MRS. RANSOME

Janet, don't speak like that to him. You're excited. (*To Tanner.*) She don't mean it, sir —she's all worked up.

JANET (*her excitement increasing, and speaking in loud tones*)

All right, Mother—I'll tell him again—I don't want none of his pity. I c'n get along without it. An' if you and him think that writin' a few words on a marriage certificate is going to make any difference, well—you're welcome to.

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TANNER

My dear girl. Don't you understand, if it was merely a question of writing a few words, I'd do it in a minute. But it's the principle of the thing.

JANET (*bitingly*)

Huh! Principle of the thing! I heard it all. You preached against it, didn't you? It's a pity you never preached a sermon on how me and him could have gotten married two years ago, 'stead of waitin' till now, when it's too late.

TANNER

Others have to wait.

JANET

We did wait. Isn't three years long enough? D'ye think we was made of stone? How much longer d'ye think we could wait. We waited till we couldn't hold out no longer. I only wish to God we hadn't waited at all, 'stead of wastin' all them years.

MRS. RANSOME (*shocked*)

Janet, you don't know what you're sayin'.

JANET

I do, an' I mean it. We waited, an' waited, an' waited. Didn't he try all he could to get a better job? 'Twasn't his fault he couldn't. We was plannin' to go West, or somewhere—where he'd have more of a chance—we was savin' up for it on the quiet. An' while we was waitin', we wanted one another—all day an' all night. An' what use was it? We held out till we couldn't hold out no longer—an' when we knew what was goin' to happen, well—we had to get married—an' that's all there's to it.

FIVE ONE-ACT COMEDIES

TANNER (*making a remarkable discovery, supporting all his personal theories on the subject*)

Ah! Then your idea was to marry *simply* because you were going to have a baby!

JANET

Sure it was. D'ye think we wanted to marry an live here on the twenty-five a week he was gettin'? We'd have bin starvin' in a month. But when this happened—we had to get married—starve or not. What else could we do?

TANNER

Well, I don't know what to say. It seems to me that you should have thought of all this before. You knew what it would mean to have a baby.

JANET

D'ye think I wanted a baby? I didn't want one. I didn't know how to stop it. If you don't like it—it's a pity you don't preach sermons on how to stop havin' babies when they're not wanted. There'd be some sense in that. That'd be more sense than talkin' about waitin'—an' waitin'—an' waitin'. There's hundreds of women around here—starvin' and sufferin'—an' havin' one baby after another, an' don't know the first thing about how to stop it. 'Tisn't my fault I'm goin' to have one. I didn't want it.

TANNER

Miss Ransome, your views astound me.

JANET

I can't help it. People may think it wrong, an' all that, but it ain't his fault an' it ain't mine. Don't you think we used to get sick of goin' to movies, an' vaudeville shows, an' all

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them other places—time after time? I wanted him to love me, and I ain't ashamed of it, neither.

MRS. RANSOME

Janet, how dare you talk like that in front of Mr. Tanner. (*To Tanner.*) She don't mean it, Mr. Tanner. She don't know what she's sayin'. I've always brought her up to be innocent about things. She must have got all this from the girls at the store where she works. She didn't get it in her home, that's sure.

JANET

No, that I didn't. Nor nothin' else, neither. You was always ashamed to tell me about anything, so I found out from the other girls, like the rest of 'em do. I've known everything for years and years—except what'd be useful to me. If I'm goin' to have a baby it's your fault, Mother, as much as anybody. You only had one yourself—but you never told me nothin'.

MRS. RANSOME (*speechless*)

Janet!

TANNER

Miss Ransome, this is not a subject I ordinarily discuss, but since you know what you do know, let me tell you there is nothing worse than trying to interfere with the workings of nature, or—if I may say so—of God.

JANET

Well, Bob said the rich people do it. He said they must know how to do it, because they never have more'n two or three children in a family; but you've only got to walk on the next block—where it's all tenements—to see ten

FIVE ONE-ACT COMEDIES

and twelve in every family, because the workin' people don't know any better. But I don't want no pity from anybody. I can take a chance on it. I got a pair of hands, an' I c'n take care of myself.

TANNER

Mrs. Ransome, it's no good my talking to your daughter while she's in this frame of mind. She appears to have the most extraordinary views. There'd be some hope for her if she'd show a little penitence—a little regret for what's been done and can't be undone. You've often heard me say in the pulpit that God is always willing to forgive the humble and penitent.

JANET (*with scorn*)

"God," indeed. Don't make me laugh. (*She points to Bob's body.*) Look at him lying there. God? What's God got to do with it? (*She kneels dejectedly at the side of the couch, rigid and silent. Tanner is obviously touched.*)

TANNER

Poor girl. I don't know what to do. If only she had shown some signs of penitence—some remorse for what has happened—I might even have gone so far as to have made the entry in the marriage certificate—seeing the punishment she's already had. (*He waits for some response from Janet, which does not come.*) But as she is now, I don't see what good it would do, so I think I'd better go.

MRS. RANSOME (*appealingly*)

Oh, don't go, Mr. Tanner. Wait just a minute while I talk to her, please. Janet, can't you

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say you're sorry for what you've done? Can't you see that Mr. Tanner only wants to be fair with you? Come, do it for our sakes—yer father and me. You know how hard he's worked, how religious he is, an' everything. You don't want to ruin us, do you? Can't you see it isn't only yourself that's got to be considered? Think of what we've done for you. Tell him you're sorry for it, do!

TANNER

I really must go.

MRS. RANSOME

Just one minute more. Please wait one minute more. Janet, what's the matter with you? Can't you see the disgrace it'll be to all of us? They'll all laugh at us—an' jeer at us. It'll follow us around wherever we go. You know how folks make fun of your father—because he keeps himself respectable—an' saves his money. Do you want them to laugh at him? Do you want them to be laughin' at you and talkin' about you? Do you want them to be makin' fun of your baby—an' callin' it a bastard—an' askin' it who its father was?

JANET (*nervously*)

They wouldn't.

MRS. RANSOME

Yes they would. An' all the time he's growin' up, the other children in school'll be tormentin' him, and callin' him names. Didn't the same thing happen to Susan Bradley's boy? Didn't they have to go an' live out in Jersey, coz she couldn't stand it no longer?

FIVE ONE-ACT COMEDIES

JANET (*defiantly*)

They went away coz he was always gettin' sick.

MRS. RANSOME

Of course he was always gettin' sick—with all the devils makin' fun of him—an' makin' his life a misery. Didn't we used to see him goin' down the block—with the tears runnin' down his cheeks—an' all of 'em yellin' names after him. Just think of the baby you're goin' to have. D'ye want that to happen to your baby? D'ye want them to make *its* life a misery—same as the other one?

JANET (*lifelessly*)

They wouldn't.

MRS. RANSOME

Of course they would. They'll tease an' torment it, just like the other—an' when he's old enough to understand—who'll he blame for it? He'll blame *you* for it. (*Inspired.*) He'll blame Bob for it—he'll hate him for it. D'ye want your boy—Bob's boy—to be hatin' his own father? What'd Bob say? What'd *he* think of you ruinin' his baby's life—an' all just because you're obstinate an' won't listen to reason. Can't you see it? Just think—if you'll only say you was in the wrong—an' do what Mr. Tanner asks you—he'll forgive you an' make everything all right. Oh, Janet—can't you see it? Ask him—beg him!

JANET

Oh, dear. Well—how c'n Mr. Tanner make it all right?

MRS. RANSOME

You know what I mean. Oh, Janet, it won't

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take him a minute to write it. If he don't, can't you see it'll ruin us all our lives?

JANET (*blankly*)

Only a minute to write it—or it'll ruin us all our lives.

MRS. RANSOME

Oh, Janet, this is your last chance. Tell him you're sorry. (*To Tanner, who has edged towards the door, and is about to leave.*) Oh, Mr. Tanner, please don't go.

TANNER

Really, I must.

MRS. RANSOME

Oh, sir! I can see she's sorry. You won't go back on your word, sir?

JANET (*feigning remorse*)

Let me think a bit. Mr. Tanner, I guess I'm in the wrong. It didn't seem to me to be wrong—that's all I got to say. I hope you'll forgive me. I'm sorry for the way I spoke—and what I done.

TANNER (*returning*)

My child, it's not for me to forgive you. Are you truly repentant—from the bottom of your heart?

JANET

Yes, sir.

TANNER

I don't like preaching sermons out of church, Janet, but I hope that this has taught you that there can be no justification for our moments of passion and willfulness. We must all try to humble our pride and our spirit. I won't go back on my word, but if I give you this chance to

FIVE ONE-ACT COMEDIES

start out afresh, you must try to wipe out what has happened by living a clean, wholesome, useful life. Will you promise me that?

JANET

I'll try, sir.

TANNER

And now, Mrs. Ransome, I suppose I'll have to fill out the certificate as though it had happened an hour or so ago. I know I may appear changeable. But I feel I am doing my duty. This may save your daughter from a life of degradation. I think the end justifies the means. But first, let me ask you, who knows that the ceremony wasn't performed before he died?

MRS. RANSOME

Only me—an' her father—an' my sister outside.

TANNER

Can she be relied upon to hold her tongue?

MRS. RANSOME

She surely can, sir.

TANNER

Well, you understand this is a very serious thing for me to do. If it becomes public, I shall be faced with a very unpleasant situation.

MRS. RANSOME

Oh, I promise you, Mr. Tanner, not a soul will know of it. We'll take our dyin' oaths, sir, all of us.

TANNER

All right. But first let me lend Janet this prayer-book. (*Takes a prayer-book out of his pocket; addressing Janet.*) Here's a prayer-book, Janet. I'll go with your mother now into the back

LICENSED

parlor, and meanwhile I want you to read over this prayer. It will comfort you in your sorrow. Come, Mrs. Ransome, take the certificate, and we'll come back later and discuss the funeral arrangements.

MRS. RANSOME (*takes the marriage certificate*)
Oh, Mr. Tanner, I don't know how to thank you.
Is there anything I can do in return? I'd be glad to.

TANNER (*as he leaves the room*)
We're trying to raise funds for a mission to spread Christianity amongst the Chinese.

(*Tanner and Mrs. Ransome go out. Janet closes the door. She walks towards the couch, looks at the prayer-book, then the couch. She flings the prayer-book to the other end of the room, smashing some of the ornaments on the mantle-shelf, and throws herself upon the side of the couch, sobbing wildly.*)

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